The Virtues of The Divine Child &c.

D. Considine, S.J.

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THE VIRTUES OF THE DIVINE CHILD
AND OTHER PAPERS

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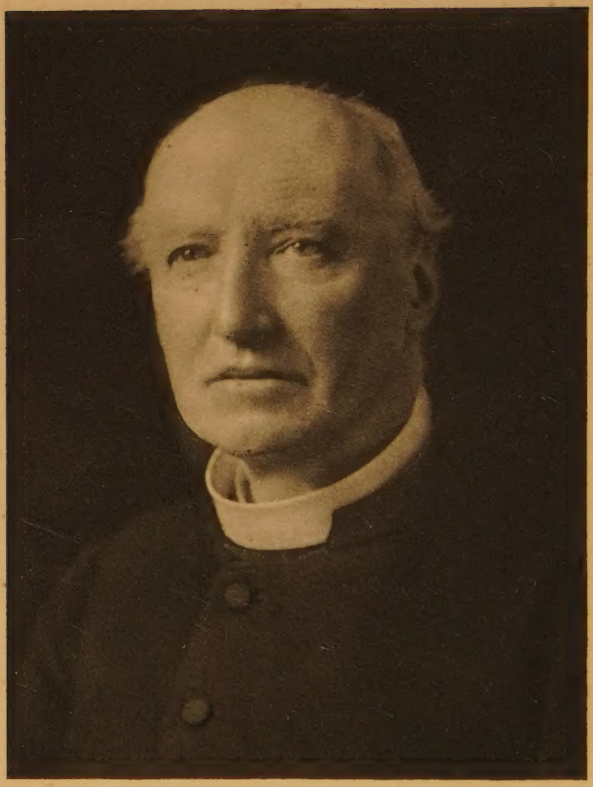

Yours affy
Daniel Aberdeen

THE VIRTUES OF THE DIVINE CHILD

AND OTHER PAPERS

BY THE LATE

DANIEL CONSIDINE, S.J.

WITH

AN INTRODUCTORY MEMOIR

BY

F. C. DEVAS, S.J.

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MEMOIR

To the many friends, who knew and venerated Father Considine, an introduction to a selection from his writings on spiritual subjects is superfluous. But time flies quickly, and this volume may be read by those to whom Father Considine is but a name, or who may never even have heard of him before: such readers may be interested in a brief account of his life, and an attempt to put on record something of the impression produced by his life-long, whole-hearted abandonment of self to the love and service of God.

Daniel Heffernan Considine was born on January 1st, 1849, at Derk House, in Old Pallas, in the county of Limerick. At the age of nineteen he entered the English Province of the Society of Jesus, and after spending fifty-four years as a Jesuit, he died on January 10th, 1922, having just completed his seventy-third year. His Father was a Protestant, and one of the boy's earliest recollections was that of seeing his mother and sister drive off to Mass on a Sunday morning, while he and his elder brother, the late Sir Heffernan Considine, C.B.,

M.V.O., D.L., had to remain at home and hear prayers read for them by their father. Mr. Considine was received into the Catholic Church when Daniel was in his tenth year, and shortly after their father's conversion the two boys were sent to England to Stonyhurst for their education.

Being a normal, healthy-minded boy, Daniel kept his thoughts about God to himself. No one could know what spiritual development was taking place in his soul; but his attraction towards God and the things of God must have begun early. In his old age he confided to a friend that in his thirteenth year he had made a sort of vow of perfection, something more than a mere resolution, a promise to God always to do the more perfect thing. This promise, he said, had been a source of considerable worry and scruple to him for some time. The idea of a vocation to the Society of Jesus seems to have been suggested to him in a perfectly natural but rather curious manner.

During a journey home to Ireland for the holidays, one of his schoolfellows entertained the party by forecasting their future careers. "Of course, Dan," he said, "you will be a Jesuit." The remark was a joke and might have produced no effect had it not been overheard by a distant relative of the Considines, who took the earliest opportunity

of calling Dan aside and warning him, if he had a vocation, not to fight against it. This warning, given by one whose own life was apparently devoted wholly to horse-racing and other forms of sport, made a deep impression on the boy's mind.

"I used to think of what he had said when I was back at Stonyhurst, and get out of bed in the night to pray," he told someone a few months before his death. But his prayer was not for a vocation; he did not want to be a Jesuit; and when he crept back into his bed it was, as often as not, to cry himself to sleep. Not only was the prospect distasteful to him personally, but he knew that the choice of such a career would be a grievous disappointment to his father. He kept his trouble to himself, not seeking counsel from any priest, or sympathy from any friend; determined to do God's will, and hoping against hope that he might be mistaken.

As the months passed conviction grew; and, however reluctantly, he had to admit that God was calling him from father and mother, and all ambition, and all other interest, to service difficult and obscure in the Society of Jesus.

At the end of his Stonyhurst course he successfully passed the London University matriculation, and then for the first time told his father of his vocation, and asked permission to offer himself to

the English Provincial. His father, surprised and disconcerted, begged him to wait before coming to so momentous a decision until he had taken his degree at Oxford. But the boy, now that his mind was made up, dreaded delay, and was anxious to put his project into execution at once. Eventually a compromise was effected: he was to go to Oxford for one year, at the end of which period, if his determination still held, he was to be free to apply for admission into the Society of Jesus.

At Lincoln College, as previously at Stonyhurst, Daniel led a quiet, reserved life, in marked contrast to that of his brother, whose social and sporting qualities endeared him to so many friends. Catholic undergraduates in those days were few in number; they used to meet together for lunch on Fridays at the Mitre Hotel; but even on that small group the younger brother left no impression. His time for influencing others had not yet come. The year's delay not only served to confirm him in the certainty of his vocation, it also witnessed the change in his mind from reluctance to desire. He did not return to the University, but after a few months at home, entered the English novitiate at Manresa House, Roehampton, on February 14, 1868.

Never, from that day till the day of his death,

was he troubled with the least doubt concerning the reality of his vocation, and in the grace of that vocation he found, throughout his life, an unfailing source of joyful gratitude.

One who was a novice with him has written: "His fellow-novices noticed, that though in outward demeanour edifying, regular, without singularity, he differed in nothing from others, yet, in a certain sense, he was hardly a novice at all; he seemed already to have reasoned out with himself the whole conception of religious life and pious practices, and so to have attained to a greater maturity in his pursuit of holiness than was to be found in their first experimental essays.

"Already, too, in those early days, beneath his calm exterior manner and common-sense—almost prosy—way of speaking of religious subjects, a strong affective vein of piety was well developed in his nature. More than once those kneeling beside him in the chapel noticed that his tears were flowing plentifully as he prayed, dropping on the bench in front of him, while he remained absorbed and motionless."

Following the course of life usual in the English Province, after leaving Manresa he studied scholastic philosophy for three years at St. Mary's Hall, Stonyhurst; was a master for five years,

spending three of these teaching at Beaumont, two at Manresa; and was then sent to St. Beuno's College, North Wales, for his theological studies, being ordained there on September 25, 1881, by the venerable Bishop of Shrewsbury, Dr. Knight.

Until his arrival at St. Beuno's he had never really come out of his shell. Whatever he had done had been well done, but in so quiet and unostentatious a way as to attract little attention from any except his superiors. In the community he had never been in any sense a leading spirit, nor had he exercised over the boys at Beaumont, or the young Jesuit scholastics at Manresa, any marked influence. At St. Beuno's, on the contrary, he began almost at once to make his presence felt and to be appreciated at his true value by his fellow-theologians, as well as by his professors and superiors.

Almost immediately after ordination, Father Considine was placed in authority: for five years he was Superior of the Jesuit scholastics at Manresa; then for seven years Prefect of Studies at Beaumont; in 1894 he was again at Manresa as Rector and Master of Novices, posts which he held for no less than fourteen years; in 1908, on leaving Manresa, he was made Rector of Wimbledon College and Mission, where he remained till he was

appointed, in 1913, one of the assistant priests at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Farm Street. There he remained till his death.

As a Superior he won from all his subjects an instant, and as they came to know him better, an increasing admiration. No one could come in contact with him without realizing that he was a man of prayer and mortification, and no one could fail to appreciate the sincerity of his complete unselfishness. But those knew him best who needed him and had the courage to confide in him.

"Courage" may seem an unnecessarily strong word, but—and especially in the case of his novices—no little courage was needed to break through the barrier of his precise, correct, but always courteous, manner. Father Considine was a man who never seemed to be "off duty." He could never be caught in an unconventional, easy attitude. His private conversation was as formal as his public. He did not seem to *invite* confidences. A timid novice was inclined to think he was being spoken to as a complete stranger by one who was always polite to strangers. The result was that the relations between the Master and his novices were too often distant, cold, restrained.

Many who were novices under him have regretted this. They would have wished for less formality,

more intimacy, more encouragement, more individual instruction, perhaps even more private admonition. Such, however, was not his way. If there was to be any advance towards intimacy, that advance must be made by others, not by himself. But, once the advance was made, his reception of it left nothing to be desired: he was kind, he was understanding, he was strong; above all, he was patient to a degree that could not fail of final success even with the most difficult of his subjects or penitents.

As Novice-master he was recognized by all his novices to be a man of extraordinary holiness. His regularity, his self-control, his zeal for the glory of God, the fervour of his public exhortations, the spiritual insight revealed in his points for meditation, and his instructions on religious life, all witnessed to his close union with God; and though his severe corporal austerities were surmised rather than known, these, and the many hours he spent in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, confirmed the common opinion. And in this intense personal holiness lay the secret of his power. His influence over others was gained less by what he said or did than by what he was. From his example the novices were really to derive that inspiration which so many of them sought in vain from words of encourage-

ment, or consolation, or remonstrance, that he could not, or would not, utter.

Many, disappointed during their noviceship, recognized afterwards that they had no cause for disappointment: he had taught them what a good Jesuit should be by being one himself.

This method of teaching has undeniable drawbacks, but it avoids the danger of "spoon-feeding," makes for independence and virility in the spiritual life, and, most important of all, does not tend to interfere unduly with the working of the Holy Ghost in the soul. If Father Considine did not exercise as much direct personal influence as some might have wished, at least he did not impose his own personality on anyone.

Almost immediately after his Profession of the Four Vows and his coming to Manresa as a priest, Father Considine was sought after as a spiritual director, and entered on that arduous apostolate of the confessional and of the parlour, and the ceaseless labour of letter writing, that was to be his chief preoccupation in life.

As a spiritual director he must not be judged by the last two or three years of his life, when, though his reputation was most widely spread, his bodily faculties were already beginning to fail, and his judgment was at times undeniably at fault. The

short period of decline must not be allowed in any way to dim the memory of the long period during which he rendered such signal service to so many souls. And here the testimony of the clergy carries special weight.

Father Considine came into contact with many secular priests at Manresa at the monthly meetings of the Apostolic Union. His humble, unworldly manner, and anxious care for their comfort, encouraged them to seek for a closer acquaintance with him, and then to ask for spiritual advice and help. Several lifelong friendships were thus begun, and of course besides these he had priest friends whom he had met on other occasions, especially when giving clergy retreats.[1]

The following tribute from Canon Edward Murnane, written at the time of Father Considine's death, may be taken as typical of the regard in which he was held by many priests:

". . . No words can express all that I owe to dear Father Considine. He was to me a father, as he was to many more: wise, patient and holy.

[1] In the summer of 1901, Cardinal Vaughan asked Father Considine to be his Director. The manner of his asking and of Father Considine's acceptance, together with the latter's record of the inner life of the Cardinal, may be read in the admirable biography of Cardinal Vaughan by Mr. J. G. Snead-Cox.

He was my confessor for many years, and it is only in Heaven I shall know all that he did for me. What he was to me spiritually he was also as a guide in my work as a priest. I never left his presence without carrying away many useful lessons. Although always a very busy man, he never grudged the time he gave me. What he was to me he was to many souls. . . ."

Another priest who had known Father Considine under different circumstances wrote also at the same time:

". . . For some eight-and-twenty, or thirty years, I counted Father Considine as my best and dearest friend, from the time when I was a convert lad and he was Prefect of Studies at Beaumont till the time when I was a middle-aged priest on the mission and he was an old Father at Farm Street. It stands to reason that in all these years our relative positions varied very much, but no passage of years could alter his unfailing kindness, his sympathy, or his intuition.

"Whether as a lad with a vague 'wish to be a priest,' or as a young man in business, or later as a clerical student, or as a priest, without hesitation I took all my real difficulties to Father Considine, and by his decision did I abide, and never once have I regretted my act.

"There was about him a sense of security, he was humble and unassuming, he was courteous and kind, his sensitiveness and almost feminine faculty of intuition made him somewhat of a prophet; but above all, he had the gift of sanctified common sense, and it was this last which gave him his power for good when dealing with ordinary souls such as mine.

"Step by step, and with infinite patience and forbearance, he guided me through many difficulties and dangers, never proposing more than he knew I could carry out, ever encouraging, practical, and uplifting. . . ."

The last stage of Father Considine's apostolic life was the period of eight years spent at Farm Street. Here he devoted himself with untiring zeal to the care of souls, preaching, giving retreats, instructing converts, and acting as director and confessor to an ever-increasing number of people of every class who sought his aid.

Throughout the weary course of the war his services to anxious and sorrowful women were enormous. His delicate sympathy, his strong and infectious confidence in God, the generosity with which he gave his time to those who leaned on him in their hour of need, drew a host of penitents to his confessional and of visitors to the Mount Street

parlours. Many of these visits he knew to be unnecessary; but though occasionally he would refuse to see a too insistent visitor in the parlour, never would he refuse a call to his confessional. As a friend in real need or distress he was indefatigable. The call of illness brought him at once to the sufferer's house, nor could any personal inconvenience or indisposition keep him away. Throughout his life, in spite of his natural shyness (for years it cost him a great effort to overcome his nervousness on being summoned to the parlour to meet a stranger), he had shown marked attention to the sick and sacrificed himself in many ways for their sake.

While Father Charles Plater, then a scholastic, was at Manresa, his father—a man whose holiness allowed him to be witty and humorous about his own death, after the manner of Blessed Thomas More—lay dying of a long and painful illness. Father Considine frequently visited him, and on one occasion the sick man fell asleep holding his visitor's hand. Though the position in which he was sitting was very uncomfortable, Father Considine insisted on remaining motionless for the space of nearly two hours rather than risk disturbing the patient's much-needed sleep.

His self-sacrifice for the healthy and normal was shown in the perfection of his practice of the

natural virtue of punctuality: he never kept people waiting, never forgot an appointment, answered letters promptly, and was careful to write at once if any plans had, unavoidably, to be altered.

During the last three years of his life many stories were circulated about extraordinary favours he was supposed to have received from God. The evidence for these is not sufficiently decisive to lead us to enlarge on the subject or insert here any of the incidents which have been related. There can, however, be little doubt that while saying Mass he was often the recipient of very special graces. His emotion while offering the Holy Sacrifice was most noticeable. From after the Consecration till after the Communion he was seized with violent trembling, and at the Communion he seemed to have great difficulty in forcing the chalice from his lips.

Whatever be the real explanation of these and other occurrences, such, for instance, as the emotion he sometimes experienced when looking at a crucifix, or picture of Our Lady, his intense love for our Lord, shown in his extraordinary devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, was known to all who had the least knowledge of Father Considine.

At Manresa, at Wimbledon, at Mount Street, besides visits to the Blessed Sacrament during the day, he spent hours at night before the tabernacle

in the domestic chapel, yet rose at the usual time in the morning, fresh and rested. During processions of the Blessed Sacrament in the church he was at times unable to restrain his tears; and once, in the refectory at Mount Street, he broke down completely while reading aloud from the Roman Martyrology the words which announce on the eve of Maundy Thursday the celebration of the institution of the Holy Eucharist.

In private conversation, in sermons, while giving retreats, whenever he spoke of the Blessed Sacrament, his face would light up with enthusiasm and joy, and the ardour and tenderness of his words would give some indication of the strength and the passion of his love.

With advancing age he seemed to become more and more absorbed in the simple contemplation of the wonderful goodness of God. He was intolerant of any phrase that even appeared to obscure the appreciation of the tender loving-kindness of Our Heavenly Father. His presentation of God was always of One waiting to heap favours upon us if we would but let Him.

He could, even to the end, be stern, and administer sharp snubs on occasion, but for the most part his direction was marked by quaint and gentle humour, as when he likened one of his penitents

to a rabbit, because "whenever you see God coming towards you, you immediately bolt."

During the greater part of his life Father Considine had enjoyed the advantage of excellent health. Till the year 1901 his worst physical enemy had been rheumatism, but in the winter of that year he suffered from a severe attack of sciatica. In 1909 he had another attack, and endured great pain. In the spring of 1920 he underwent a serious operation. The operation was successful but left him very weak, and in the autumn of the following year he was so ill with kidney disease that he was anointed.

He was then moved from Mount Street to a nursing home, where he remained for nearly two months, till on November 4th, when his recovery was seen to be impossible, he was taken to Manresa, that he might die in a house of the Society.

On December 5th he was again anointed, and on January 10, 1922, nine days after his 73rd birthday, he died.

During the period of this last illness his mind was frequently clouded; in conversation he would pass from sheer nonsense to his old sound "sanctified common sense" with a suddenness that bewildered his visitors. He himself was conscious of this, and told the Brother who was nursing him

that he felt the humiliation of not being able to talk rationally and piously of holy things. He was, however, able to receive Holy Communion daily. The constant deep interior happiness and peace of his soul had manifested itself during his life, not only in his speech but in his whole appearance, especially in his blue eyes, bright and clear as those of a child, and no less innocent. In death the same happiness was his, and was apparent to those who prayed by his bedside. In peace and calm he gave back his soul to God.

His body was buried in the private cemetery in the Manresa grounds.

The papers which form this volume were (with the exception of that on "Confession") contributed to the *Farm Street Calendar* during the years 1914—1920. It has seemed to many that their value is such as to justify their republication in a more permanent form. Though addressed to the readers of that magazine, and hence primarily to a lay audience, yet the teaching they contain is of universal application in the spiritual life, and they will, we think, be no less welcome to those living under a religious rule.

It was inevitable that papers written during the period of the European war should contain fre-

quent references to the anxieties under which all were then living. As these references seemed to restrict the lessons enforced to a special set of circumstances now, happily, no longer existing, they have, for the most part, been removed.

Except for this, the papers appear practically as they were printed in the pages of the magazine.

F.C.D.

I

THE VIRTUES OF THE DIVINE CHILD

On the first Christmas Day Jesus Christ deigned to be born into our troubled world. It is our special business and privilege now to give Him the kind of welcome which He would most desire. That we may not disappoint Him we must try to understand what reasons moved Him to appear amongst us in so strange a form; for we certainly could never have guessed that the earth's Creator would shew Himself upon it as a little child.

In the first place, then, it is plain that the meaning of His visit is peaceful. He is, we know, the Lord of War, but His thoughts towards us are at present thoughts of peace. He is alone. He brings no weapons with Him and no guards; the Angels who announced His birth, having performed their mission, returned to the Heaven whence they had been sent. He is going to do His own work by Himself henceforth; they may go back to the Palace which He has quitted. "A Child is born to us; a Child is given to us." God has entered His earthly kingdom as a child, the true and only child of His Mother Mary, ready to take all the consequences which His childhood entails.

There lie before Him long weary years of helplessness, and speechlessness, and dependence on others; He has foreseen and accepted them all; He has counted the cost, and it is even less than He was willing to give. If He is to become a child—a human child—with a human body and a human soul, although inhabited by, possessed by, and ruled by the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, He must be a perfect child, a child in whom is found all childhood's attractiveness, all childhood's charm. Childhood is as the first breath of spring, the earliest bud, the most delicate bloom of life. The Child Jesus was the flowering of the Root of Jesse; in Him the Godhead dwelt corporeally, to Him, therefore, there could be wanting nothing of life's opening loveliness, and fragrance, and grace.

He came to make Himself known to men, and He chose His own method of doing so. He would introduce Himself to us at His own time and in His own fashion: and every circumstance should serve to tell us more about Him, to make it clearer to us how He wishes us to think of Him, and in what way to treat Him. A child does not love ceremony; in fact, it does not understand it. It knows nothing of the distinctions of wealth and class; it welcomes all because it believes all to be its friends. *There* is one lifting of the veil, one Divine intimation, one hint, if we may so call it, how God desires to be regarded. He has bowed the heavens and come down to earth, not in search

of pomp and parade—the courtiers He summoned were shepherds keeping the night watches over their flocks; the entrance of the cave was open to all comers as to the midnight air.

What are the qualities of a child? First of all, love for its parents, affection, *affectionateness*. This is an instinct—as yet it cannot use its reason—implanted in it by Nature, that is by God. We cannot suppose that it was denied to the Babe of Bethlehem. In Him, whose human soul always saw God face to face, it was not an instinct but a virtue. It is incredible that the Son, who in His manhood loved His Mother so dearly, should have slighted her in His childhood's days. We can read in her bold remonstrance with Him at the Finding in the Temple, "Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing," how freely He allowed her to address Him and how, although "they did not understand the word," He went back with them to Nazareth. It is worth while dwelling a little on this *affectionateness*; this disposition to love, this quick response to affection shewn Him by others, which was a characteristic of the Child Jesus. If it truly be a mark of Him, if it be a part of the revelation of Him as He is, and as He wishes us to know Him, it ought to have an important bearing upon our service of Him. There have been, perhaps there are, Christians—and Catholics also—who appear to think that the highest, or at any rate the safest, worship of God consists in an awful rever-

ence for Him, a realization of His Power, a respect for His Justice. Even if they would admit that a certain familiarity might on some occasions be permitted, they would so surround it with conditions, would introduce so many cautions against irreverence, that a plain man might well consider it better to keep away from such dangerous ground altogether. Others would arrive at the same conclusion because of the danger, as they conceive it, of being carried away by heated feelings, which, it seems, are most easily excited and have most disastrous consequences in matters of religion. Hence it would seem to follow that, even if our Lord shews Himself affectionate to us, even if He became once a little child and "dwelt among us" of His own choice, we shall not please Him by shewing affection to Him in return and by believing that we are always welcomed into His Presence! Can it be that He is, as it were, a little ashamed of His days on earth, and, particularly, does not like to be reminded of the time when He was carried about, a helpless babe in the arms of His Blessed Mother? The witness of the Catacombs, in which there are so many representations of Him in this position, His own practice of shewing Himself in the form of a Child in miraculous appearances in the Sacred Host, seem to prove the contrary. Surely the display of affection by Him is meant to provoke a like outpouring of affection by us, and is a sufficient warrant to us that we need not be afraid of so behaving to Him as He delights

to behave to us. Why did He clothe Himself in our flesh, why did He take on Him the winsome form and ways of a little child if He did not want to make prize of our hearts and to teach us to put away all empty fears and embarrassment on His account?

If *affectionateness* is the first sign of a good child, perhaps we may rank *docility* as the second. *Docility,* as we know, simply signifies *teachableness,* readiness to be taught, a willingness to learn. It is becoming, and indeed necessary, in the case of a child who, at the outset of life and for long after, must depend upon older people for its knowledge and instruction. The Divine Child indeed, being God, had infinite knowledge, but we are considering Its human soul in Its human body. Its human memory might be stored with facts, like ours; Its human intelligence could reason, like our own. Through Its senses It was brought, like ourselves, into communication with the outward material world, and exercised upon it all the powers of observation and comparison belonging to the most perfect human understanding which God ever created. It seems most probable that our Lord learnt His letters and the other parts of elementary education common among the Jews from His Blessed Mother or His Foster-Father; we know that at the age of twelve He joined what might almost be called a Catechism class in the Temple at one Paschal solemnity (St. Luke ii. 46). Afterwards we cannot doubt that, in modern phrase, He

served an apprenticeship to Joseph in the trade of a carpenter. He had plenty of opportunities, therefore, of practising the virtues of a pupil and of bearing the strain involved by that state—a strain of which our own times are impatient in a high degree. The immense and ever-growing increase in human knowledge—we need not now inquire into its causes or its value—ought to have made us all more *docile,* more teachable, as there is so much more to be taught. But the result has been rather to set everyone to work teaching others before they have first been pupils themselves. We have an extraordinary number of self-constituted professors in ordinary life—I am not speaking, of course, of universities or schools—who are ready to impart groundless information on all subjects, human and divine, to those who will listen to them, and who will rarely listen to anyone themselves. A docile mind is an open mind, a flexible mind, looking out for help from others: ready to be set right, not obstinate or perverse, sincerely seeking the truth. Of how many of our minds is this a true description? Indocility, unteachableness, is a hindrance to human knowledge. How much more so to divine! The difficulty is not that God is not willing to teach us, but that we are not willing to learn. We do not even know ourselves, our own weakness, our own pressing needs, our own greatest dangers; we live, as far as our souls are concerned, in a sort of fools' paradise, and how can we expect to know the Infinite God? He Him-

self alone can manifest Himself to us, for He is above our human searching out; and yet He cannot allow His Divine Light to stream into our souls because we are too proud to be taught. Our self-caused darkness is so thick that we do not feel the need of, we do not crave for light. It will be some kind of preparation for docility in the things of God, after the pattern of the Divine Child, if we strive to gain more docility during all this time in the affairs of our daily life. More deference to others, less insistence on our own opinions, a more real effort to enter into others' minds, to understand why they view things so differently from ourselves; such a training in humility, charity, and fellow-feeling will bring us very near to the Divine Child who was so loving to all, and who, though Infinitely Wise, did not disdain to go to school to His own imperfect creatures on earth.

II

STOCK TAKING

Persons engaged in business are in the habit, as is well known, of taking from time to time an account of their affairs. They wish to know what their true position is, whether in one word they are making or losing money. With that object they go carefully through their books, and after a general survey, strike a balance which will answer without any fear of mistake the question they have been putting to themselves. Christ tells us that the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. We need not be ashamed therefore to go to them for a lesson in the management of the business of our souls. This month is particularly well suited for our purpose, as it sets us within the borders of the New Year before the Old has quite faded from our sight. There is still time for us to throw a backward glance upon the twelve months which have been withdrawn from our sum of life, and to recall them with sufficient distinctness to be able to get from them most useful instruction and guidance for the twelvemonth yet to come, if so much is still our due.

Let us then, like travellers who have climbed a mountain top, as we rest our limbs awhile and are proud of our achievement, scan a little leisurely the route we have followed, see where we began, at what point we first left the plain, how the road zigzagged, with what changes of level, now gradual, now abrupt, until at last by mere paths or where there were no paths at all, we have been lifted up hundreds, thousands of feet into the clear, or perhaps foggy, air. Since, however, our present journey is made in imagination and not in fact we can, and indeed must, arrange these little matters for our own convenience, and will therefore suppose that as we stand on the peak of 1916 no mists dim our view, and that by memory's aid we can see spread before us, or I should have said behind us, the life-scene of 1915. We have been mounting all the time, whether we noticed it or not, we are fifty-two weeks older than we were a year ago—the remark if somewhat obvious is none the less true —and we want to sum up our impressions of the journey. Some foolish people will at once say that they have no impressions at all, and don't want to have impressions, and see no good in impressions; "it's no use crying over spilt milk"—forget what is unpleasant as soon as ever you can, the great thing is to go ahead, and to let bygones be bygones, especially if you are yourself to blame. What talk is this about fifty-two weeks! One year, one week, one day, is very much the same as another. There is no time to think about time,

except to be sorry that you have less left of it every day. And yet there *is* a great deal to learn from 1915, if we would only question it. We *ought* to receive impressions on our travel through life, and if we keep our eyes and our ears open we shall receive them: not merely or chiefly impressions of worldly things, but impressions regarding the things of our soul, regarding our moral conduct, our character, our dangers, and our needs.

A man who hurries through the days of his life, and finds one simply the pattern of another—to whom each dawn, or at any rate many dawns, do not bring a fresh message, a new interest in life, or any increase of interest in the old one, can hardly be said to be living at all, as far as God is concerned. He chooses to be a passenger in a sort of endless moral tube, the walls of which are constructed of his worldly business and cares and friends: they close him in and bound his life in every direction, and supply him with an atmosphere as unwholesome and sometimes as foul as we Londoners may buy for twopence. What could such a man know of the sweet country air, or its green fields, and the blue sky above? But God did not intend us to live always in tunnels. The world is really very wide even for the most cramped of us, because the Infinite God inhabits it, although of course it cannot contain Him. He is in the workroom of the factory and in the bowels of the mine: He is in the garrets of the slums no less, perhaps indeed more readily, than in the saloons of May-

fair. Therefore to every one of us life is or ought to be a very real thing, calling forth all our powers, giving us constant subjects to think about and work for, requiring all our attention, and obliging us to take mental notes of how we are doing as the days pass by. We notice or our friends notice the changes in our bodily health, whether we look well or badly, are losing or perchance are putting on flesh, whether we stoop or hold ourselves erect. Why is so much care lavished on our temporal good and so little on the welfare of the soul?

What then have we to say about the days of 1915, which now have come and gone, and which we are tempted to consign to the refuse-heap as we throw their calendar into our waste-paper basket? Those dead days are full of memories, and in those memories we can see our faces reflected as on the surface of a lake. They have been bright with hope or darkened by disappointment, pale with fear or flushed by enjoyment, and our outward looks have only been the expression of the changes of the soul within. We began the year with so many anticipations, we were to do such great things, we had so many pet schemes to carry out, what has happened to them all? How many have gone awry! How many have proved impracticable! How many have proved mistakes, so that their very success has been a misfortune in itself! We were to have uprooted so many bad habits, and planted so many good. The weak points of our character were to have been strength-

ened, and the strong ones developed along their proper lines. But what a tangle and confusion it all seems now. How few of our prophecies have come true in the event. Yet this very tangle, these very miscalculations, convey a teaching of their own. If we have been wrong once, wrong a hundred times, we may learn at least our own fallibility in the future and never forget to make allowance for it in all our plans.

It is very interesting again to compare our own forecasts of the course of our lives during 1915 with that they have actually pursued. I mean of the places where we were to be engaged, the work we should have undertaken, the persons with whom we should come in contact, the incidents in which we should take part. Of course, as most people's lives are uneventful, as the phrase goes, or are eventful only at rare and particular points, there must be in them a considerable sameness if we do not look below the surface. But, granting this to be true, there is room for a good deal of variety even within narrow limits. How a chance acquaintance, still more a new friendship, or alas! the loss of an old one, may affect us for good or for evil! A book, an article in a periodical or a newspaper, the casual remark of a fellow-passenger in a railway train, has before now started in the mind a train of thought which has led to great issues—a conversion, a deeper seriousness, a higher plane of life. Sometimes we change or are changed in the ceaseless whirl of life without know-

ing it ourselves, for others influence us as we influence others, unconsciously. A. says to B., "Have you met C. lately? What has come to him (or to her)? No longer the same person—grown so lively (or so dull), so bitter (or so sweet)!" C. meanwhile stoutly denies the transformation. We may be sure then that a dozen months have not passed over our heads without leaving on us traces which it is well to register if we can. We may be better, we may be worse, but certainly we are not precisely the same as before. This is a very simple fact which probably we had left out in our day-dreams at the opening of 1915. It did not occur to us that the person of whom we were thinking, whom our fancy painted in all sorts of circumstances yet unborn, if not fighting dragons or rescuing enchanted princesses, as at least coming forth victorious from difficulties and trials, that we ourselves might have greatly altered when the fulfilment of our dream was due. We are full of courage on our knees while dangers are still remote, but how it oozes out when the critical moment has arrived.

The contrary also may sometimes happen, and we may face the ordeal more bravely than its anticipation in thought. But the moral is still the same—that we cannot argue from our feelings now to what they will be in the future. The mere lapse of time assuages sorrow, reconciles us to disappointments, reconciles us to all manner of ills. "I can bear no more," the poor patient cries in the

pangs of sickness, or after the surgeon's knife, but, wait some hours or days, and kindly Nature, that is Nature's God, brings a measure of relief, and perhaps even recovery at the end. Take again our year's burden of cares, and here we must begin by separating the false from the true. In how many cases have we dreaded what never came to pass, and lain awake at night devising remedies for troubles simply of our own creation. But there have been undoubtedly only too many real anxieties, real in forecast, real in the event. At the time they appeared to overwhelm us; "All Thy billows and Thy waves have passed over me," Jonas prayed in his hour of trial; yet he was preserved. So we too have survived the storm, many storms, and are still alive in 1916. But we shall be unpardonable if we are no wiser for our last year's experience, often, it may be, dearly bought. We shew folly not necessarily in committing mistakes, for mistakes are common to our human nature, but in repeating mistakes wilfully, wantonly, in spite of frequent warnings, as it were, in broad daylight. As we look back upon the huge pile of our last year's works, may we not fitly borrow the imagery of St. Paul and ask ourselves how much of it is likely to abide the trial of fire, how much of it was "wood" and "hay" and "stubble"—trifles, vanity, or worse, and how much "gold, silver, and precious stones"? St. Philip Neri used to say pleasantly with regard to spiritual reading that he liked the works, that is, the books of people whose

name began with S, that is, of *Saints*. Suppose we were to take S as signifying not *Saint* but *Self*, to how many bundles of our last year's labours should we not have to attach the label S, *Selfish*, done for ourselves, for our own comfort, our own glorification, our own advantage. And, I much fear, how quickly and how brightly they would burn. How many of our witty but unkind sayings, how much of our uncharitableness, how much of our conceit would crackle there! We may hope indeed that the fire would spare us something, would respect at least a few objects in that vast collection. What are the "gold" and "silver" and "precious stones" of life? Here and there after the conflagration we pick up some articles over which the flames have had no power, in some instances slightly blackened perhaps, because our motives have not been quite pure, but yet substantially intact and unharmed. What are these jewels? Sorrows patiently borne, injuries not resented, humble, gentle, kindly thoughts and words and deeds—above all the pure gold, which no fire can tarnish, of deeds done wholly for the love of God. How happy shall we be if in the year just begun we practise the teachings of the year only now just ended!

III

A POINT OF VIEW

No one can look over a wide stretch of country, especially if it embraces features of varying interest, hills, and valleys, and streams, without finding out of how much importance it is to take up the right position for one's purpose. There is a key to every arrangement of nature, as there is or ought to be to every painting which copies it, whereby out of apparent confusion order comes forth and even beauty out of ugliness. Only you must place yourself at the proper point of view. I think it is St. Augustine who very beautifully compares God's government of the world to a gorgeous tapestry which is without meaning to an eye which does not see it aright. The poet Wordsworth complains of the weary burden of this "unintelligible" world; and this thought is only too familiar in the literature of to-day, as though the weight and the mystery of life grew less endurable, instead of more, as the centuries speed on.

May it be that some of us are, if not precisely crying out before we are hurt, yet fancying that our hurts are worse than they are; and may it not be that we do not recognize from what quarter our wounds

really come? Is our outlook on life from the true angle, do we post ourselves at the proper point of view? I am sure that this subject cannot fail to be interesting (even if it does not prove to be profitable, as I hope it will), for most people have their own view of things in general and intensely believe in it if they believe in nobody else's.

Many people, for instance—I had almost written *most* people—again, believe, or at any rate speak as if they believed, act as if they believed, that they are the victims of a peculiar persecution by Providence. Nothing goes right with them, or ever will go right with them, except by some extraordinary accident which will not be repeated; their only remark at each new fatality is, "Just like my luck," "It's always the same," "I never seem to be able to get my prayers answered." Their point of view seems to be that some people are born with silver spoons in their mouths, and others, to which latter catalogue they themselves belong, with wooden ones, and as it was in the beginning so it must be to the end. It is wonderful how clever they are in fitting into this theory all the occurrences of their lives, how they will stretch out their woes and take in their blessings to prove themselves right, and to convict Providence of personal spite in their own case, very much as tailors are wont to cover their misfits by mysterious markings of chalk upon the offending garments during what may be called the rehearsal of "trying-on." Often enough foolish ideas of this kind are very difficult

to root out, and so far from being loosened by experience seem to grow and harden with our growth. Usually they will yield only to the superior force of some special visitation of God, as when on the day of Pentecost "suddenly there came a sound from Heaven, as of a mighty wind coming," and the Holy Spirit Himself sweeps the soul clear of all its entanglements to fill it with His light and love. But it is plain that we cannot reckon on such interpositions, and it therefore becomes our duty to beware of dangers which may make them our only hope.

Another common persuasion, perhaps almost more common than the one to which I have just referred, lets Providence off the charge of unfairness, but only to find It guilty of neglect. There are some 1,500 millions of men on the face of the globe: what can I, the 1,500 millionth part of the population, really matter? I can't matter. It is pure folly and conceit to think that I do matter. God must leave me out of account altogether, and if I am wise I shall accept the inevitable. In fact I shall see in it an explanation of many a puzzle. I shall understand my loneliness—why should I expect the Creator to trouble about me? my disappointments: why should the Creator care to work out my will? my oppression by others: what reason has He to take my part or interfere in the quarrels of His poor little creatures on their several anthills at all? This is the frankly pagan view of life. Aristotle considered it unworthy of the

Deity to mix Himself up in the affairs of men. Has he not many unavowed disciples in the world more than two thousand years after his death?

However men may wrangle about the definition of religion, this surely must be true, that any religion which deserves the name must bring us nearer to God; and, indeed, is not this the safest test whereby a religion, *the* religion, for there can be only one, may be judged, whether it brings God closer to us and us closer to God? One sufficient objection to the theory of God's caprice, or again, of His neglect in His rule of His creatures, is that these notions practically thrust Him out of our everyday life, at any rate out of our homage and love instead of bringing Him in. We may then safely discard them as points whence we ought to contemplate and order our life. They bewilder us, they embitter us, they give us no clue for guidance, they quench our hope. On the other hand, the feeling of our insignificance compared with the immensity of God is too natural and at first blush too paralysing not to require a little further consideration. I do not want to try to say smart things, and to throw dust in the eyes of my readers by the help of epigrams, but the fact of the matter is that it is the greatness of God which gives importance to my littleness. For Him nothing is great, as compared with Himself, and nothing is little in so far as it is His handiwork. Not only does He "hate nothing of what He has made," but it is in its place and degree inexpressibly dear to

Him. The Greek philosopher has seized a truth, but by the wrong end. It is precisely because the Deity is so high that He can without loss of dignity stoop to the lowest of His works, for He dwells in the least as well as in the highest. We speak familiarly of a man throwing himself into his work, putting his heart into it, and the words though figurative have a real meaning on our lips, but they are no figure if applied to God. While remaining always and essentially distinct from His creatures, He gives Himself to them, not in part only, for He is One and has no parts, but wholly and entirely. "In Him we live and move and have our being." We are in closer contact with Him than with our very selves. Every moment of our life is a gift from Him, new and free, separate by itself, which He is not obliged to continue because He has once begun, and which no one else can supply if He fail us.

Thus it happens that He, the Infinite God, is interested in the smallest movement of His creatures, indeed, that without Him it could not take place, and that in a sense it involves Him, without sin, in its own responsibility. He cannot, He may not let the world go its own way and shift for itself; without Him there would be no world to reckon with any more.

Hence we cannot get away from Him, if we would. Peter answered our Lord's question, "Will you also go away?" that is, cease to be My disciples, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" If we could

go away from God, the Source of our being, or He could go away from us, we should simply fall back into the nothingness out of which we were taken. People say that it is difficult to realize the presence of God, that we cannot see Him, or hear Him or feel Him, which is perfectly true; the same thing is true in a lower sense of our own souls—but the reason is not because God is at a distance from us, but because our intellect cannot encompass Him, although He be so near. We speak of Heaven as our true home, and of our life on earth as a pilgrimage; but we must not therefore draw the conclusion as too many, it is to be feared, in practice do, that here below we cannot have God's companionship or enjoy the solace of His love. Our Lord's words spoken at His Last Supper were "Abide in Me, and I in you." We cannot on earth any more than in heaven do without God or dispense with His aid: only on earth we have the unhappy power of forgetting His existence and His goodness if we so desire. We cannot help living on His bounty if we live at all, but we may be His disobedient, His ungrateful pensioners all the time. I have mentioned some ways of regarding life which are inadequate or wrong. What is a point of view which will put everything into its proper perspective, and is fitted for every sight, weak as well as strong? *Thankfulness*, in all places, in all circumstances, always. God is ever with us, we are ever with Him, we cannot help forming some opinion of Him: we must have some

theory about Him if He ever enters our thoughts. What is it to be? A good opinion, a sense of how much we owe Him. Even if we feel that we do very little for Him and indeed are of very little account ourselves, we can at least thank Him for His kindness, we need not be ashamed to acknowledge it. Good manners teach us to say "thank you" for a service rendered. And God is at our service, tends us, provides for us all day, all night long. We can surely say so much in our hearts without any loss of dignity on our part. We may kiss the Hand that feeds us. We need undertake no new obligations, we need make no promise, we only meet a gift, a never-ending succession of gifts, with an expression of gratitude. We do not refuse His presents, we cannot refuse His presents if we are to retain our being; we give Him in return simply our thanks. A beggar would do no less and we need do no more. Of course He does not require a repetition of acts, but a disposition, a temper of thanksgiving. We can have His mercies for the asking, or unasked, if only we will acknowledge them. On what easy terms does the Eternal God open to us His stores! It needs no long practice of austerity or high contemplation to tell Him that we are grateful for what we have received. All His gifts are not equally pleasant, but they are all from His Hand, and we know that they are bestowed for our good, although we do not see how. If we ran our course with eyes always open to God's favours showered upon us and with

grateful hearts, we should not have run in vain and should receive the prize.

Thankfulness ripens into love and love is the fulfilling of the law. How fond Jesus Christ was of publishing His thanks to His heavenly Father! How deeply He felt the slights put upon Him by Simon the Pharisee, and, on the other hand, the atonement made for them by Magdalen's love. "Thou gavest Me no water for My Feet, but she with tears hath washed My Feet, and with her hairs hath wiped Them." Paradise was His thank-offering to the Good Thief for His defence of Him on Calvary. It will also be the sure reward of all whom no contradictions, no perplexities can hinder from always praising, always thanking God.

IV

THE FEELINGS IN RELIGION

St. Francis of Sales says of the dances of his own day that like mushrooms the best of them were little worth and the worst very bad indeed. In somewhat the same way the emotions are under the ban of some ascetical writers, who seem to regard them always with suspicion and are never so well pleased as when they can be set aside altogether. "Beware of your feelings, do not trust them, do not follow them, they are most dangerous guides," these authorities endlessly warn us, and they have certainly succeeded in creating a general impression that what may be called safe spirituality steers as clear of the feelings as possible. This is a matter of so much importance in itself, and is also so far-reaching in its consequences, that a little time spent in considering it will assuredly not be thrown away.

What then is the true ideal of Christian life? In what ought it to issue? What ought it to produce? Is a holy person one who systematically tries to deaden in himself or herself all sensibility to the beauty which clothes the earth as a garment: to have no eye for its order, no ear for its har-

monies, no sense for its fragrance? Do we necessarily please God by casting out of our life as far as we may the brightness and colour of material things, by never watching the streaks of dawn or the glory of the sunset, never finding any lesson in the terror of the storm or the mercy of its lulling, never steeping our spirit in the calm that broods over the sleeping sea, and gives us perhaps the most perfect image, the nearest sense of what is beyond all image and all sense, the Eternity and the Immensity of the Creator? It is not of course to be denied that there are instances in the lives of the saints of their apparently setting before themselves as an object the plucking up by the roots of their whole sensitive nature; perhaps they have sometimes expressed themselves more strongly than they really meant; but in any case, we are now discussing not the exceptions or the peculiarities of sanctity, but what are the principles on which a holy, even a perfect life should ordinarily rest. Are we to view our senses, our imagination, and principally our feelings as intended to be our enemies or our allies in the work of our salvation?

On the face of it it must seem unlikely that God should furnish us with powers which were to be a perpetual snare to us on our journey towards heaven, with which we must always be fighting, which no vigilance can guard against and no resolution can quell. Does not this account of things bring us perilously near the Lutheran heresy that our nature has been thoroughly corrupted by

original sin, not merely weakened and darkened, but actually poisoned at its very source? We Catholics know that Adam's sin overset the balance which God of His own accord set between our passions and our reason, so that our passions, that is our feelings, no longer wait for reason's command to awaken and arise, as they were obliged to do before the Fall. That great damage, fruitful of terrible evil ever since, has been done us by the first transgression; but it did not make our nature bad or alter it essentially for the worse, it only took away from it what never was its due, it robbed it of a safeguard which did not make sin impossible, otherwise Adam would have stood, but which gave precious time for deliberation before any serious harm could be done. To keep a cool head is a wise piece of advice for anyone engaged in distracting business, and is more necessary in the warfare of the spirit than even in the struggles of life. I suppose this is the explanation, or one of the explanations, why so many of our spiritual guides caution us against the dangers of feeling in our service of God. Feeling is thought to make the head hot, to disorder the judgment, to hurry us blindly along, and then, perhaps, like a gust of wind, to end as suddenly as it began and leave us among the rocks. It would, therefore, seem best on this view of life to do without feeling wherever we can, to hold it as it were at arm's length, to look upon it as an unwelcome and probably dangerous intruder, and to reckon ourselves never so

safe and never so pleasing to God as when we can truthfully say that our relations with Him are conducted on the most reasonable and business-like lines possible.

Assuredly we have now moved far away from the perils of hysteria and revivalism, but are we not drawing uncomfortably near to a blank, colourless, chilly worship of the Deity, which is so very rational as to verge almost on rationalism? Whatever wary moralists or austere ascetics lay down, we may be quite sure that the God who has fashioned us so wonderfully both in body and soul had a use for every part of His handiwork, and can give a very good reason for all that He has put into it. It is throughout and wholly intended for Him, to be His habitation, to be consecrated by His Presence, and in every part to minister to Him according to its nature and capabilities—the body to render Him a bodily service, and in that service to be the handmaid of the soul, the soul to receive Him into all its powers, and through those powers to know Him, to witness to Him, and to prove its love. A theory of the spiritual life which leaves out or practically neglects, or even treats as an enemy, any portion of our nature is thereby condemned, for God is the Author of all our nature and requires the homage of it all. The senses, then, the imagination, the feelings, are all to be filled with Him, and as far as possible through their proper objects, to be fixed on Him, to lead us up to Him. The earth is His footstool, our Lord Him-

self has said, everything on it should remind us of Him and point our thoughts to His Throne hidden behind the clouds of heaven. And there is a particular reason why we who live in the twentieth century and in a non-Catholic country ought to take this teaching to heart. If our ideals are not correct, if we do not clearly know what God asks of us to please Him and what we are to ask of ourselves, we may run into a vast deal of trouble to little or no purpose, and we may travel far but in a wrong direction.

Take our feelings, for instance. How far are we to employ them, to cultivate them in our intercourse with God? The Church in her liturgy, in her official and, as it were, ceremonial character, usually begins her prayers by invoking one or other of the Divine Attributes: *Almighty, Everlasting God,* etc., choosing by preference, so it seems, those in which His Majesty is most impressively set forth. Perhaps this accounts for the common practice among Protestants of referring to God simply as *the Almighty.* This may appear a small matter, but it is not so in fact. It means that the first thought which associates itself with their conception of God, the aspect under which He first presents Himself to them is that of Power, the Power who rules all things, whom all must obey. Or they think of Him as the All-seeing One, who searches the reins and the hearts and who will bring into judgment the lightest idle word a man shall utter. He is indeed All-powerful, All-seeing, and

the Judge of all the earth. But if He is no more than this, and if He wishes us to dwell mainly on His Power, His Wisdom, and His Justice, these truths about Him are much more fitted to frighten away from Him weak, purblind sinners like ourselves than to encourage us to draw near. It is hard, I think, to overrate the mischievous effect, as I believe it to be, on youthful minds of early notions impressed upon them by teachers or parents or even spiritual books, regarding God's extreme hatred of sin and vigilance in discovering it and rigour in punishing it. I do not say that the single statements made are doctrinally unsound; but taken as a whole, and in their want of proper balance and perspective, they compose a picture not of the *Bon Dieu* whom we are drawn to love, but of the stern Creator whose wrath we must fear. What wonder if these exaggerated ideas of what is called the Divine Justice bear fruit later on in doubts and fears and scruples, which narrow and darken the subsequent life of so many men and women excellent and pious in every other respect, who find it almost impossible to shake off the spell of such childish bugbears, and insist on believing to the end in these spiritual ghosts!

A sufficient answer to persons who bid us to check all feeling in our dealings with God is surely found in the example of Our Divine Master Himself when He walked this earth and "went in and out" among His Apostles and disciples. He thought it no shame to weep passionate tears over

Jerusalem on the day of what seemed His triumph, but which, as He knew, only preluded His doom. His grief at the death of Lazarus made even His enemies cry out in wonder "behold how He loved him." He invited John to lay his head on His bosom at the Last Supper and inspired him to put the favour on record for all time, as well as his title of "the disciple whom Jesus loved." He would not have little children scolded when they flocked around Him with the sure attraction of childhood to One who understood and loved them, "because of such is the kingdom of heaven." If Jesus shewed such feelings during His mortal life, and made a triple declaration of love by Peter his amends for his triple denial on that Thursday night, it would indeed be a strange conclusion to infer that our Lord wishes us to-day to be as ice or marble in our converse with Him, never to move even the lips of our heart, but to hang our heads in His sacred Presence, terrified and abashed. Has He, who while on earth was the most accessible of men, who put everyone at his ease, after whom, in the phrase of His enemies, "the whole world had gone out," suddenly changed His ways and nature, and forgotten what manner of Man He was at Nazareth, on Calvary, by the shores of the Lake of Galilee? It is not the excess of feeling, but the lack of it, which is the danger of the religious world of to-day.

V

"SERVE YE THE LORD WITH GLADNESS"

Our lively neighbours, the French, were fond of saying that English people take their pleasures sadly, and I fancy that the epigram contains some truth, but I quote it for quite another reason. It happens to be, if thrown into a slightly different shape, exactly the kind of reproach which worldly people are constantly addressing to persons who are earnest in the service of God. The unreligious —I do not call them the irreligious, please observe—do not necessarily quarrel with the good or call them hard names, they simply pity them; they commiserate their lot, they are sorry for their mistakes. How sad it is, they think and say, that such a lot of good fellows, who might have made dashing cavalry officers, choose to mope in cassocks instead, or at any rate do not leave church-going, except on Sundays, to their women-folk, for whom alone plainly Providence intended it; and as for the ladies themselves, when will they understand that the cloister is meant for those of their sex who have no faces and no voices, and that it is positively sinful to bury in it charms vouchsafed by God to brighten and gladden the world!

I suspect that the objects of this somewhat scornful pity on the part of the gay world would have something to plead if they were called upon for their defence, but leaving that aside, I feel interested at the moment in another question; that is, how it comes about that people careless of religion should think themselves better off than those who practise it? Why do they bestow their pity where it is not needed? Usually the poor do not pity the rich, or the starving the well-fed. Why cannot the children of the world see what ought to be so obvious? Is it, perhaps, an instance in another matter of the impression that good people—which is not the same altogether as the people of England—are apt to take their pleasures sadly?

If there is this impression abroad that to be good is to be miserable, or even to wear a miserable look, certainly the impression, whether ill-founded or well-founded, is very unfortunate and very much to be regretted. I do not wish to cite Luther as an authority on points of doctrine, but he was a judge of popular feeling, and we can all see the point of his defence of himself as the composer of music to his hymns, that "he did not want the devil to have all the good tunes." We must not let so-called men or women of pleasure claim or believe that they can count on their side all the good or even the best tunes of life. They would have it that theirs is the happiest lot at any rate in the present, whatever the hereafter may bring forth; but God's people firmly hold that their own

methods are wisest, not for eternity only but for time.

This month of August is by courtesy holiday time, and the topic I am proposing is, therefore, not inappropriate. Has rejoicing, have holidays, any proper place in a good life or are they foreign to it? Shall we quietly accept the theory which the world tries to impose upon us, that we barter happiness here below for what is to follow afterwards, and that the price which we deliberately pay down with our eyes wide open, is comparative wretchedness now for bliss above the skies? Even if it were so, and even if worldlings were right in their statement of the case, our choice would not be proved to be wrong; but we have first of all to make out beyond any possibility of mistake whether we are placed in such a dilemma as is suggested. Is the balance of enjoyment—looking to this life only as its scene—amongst the serious-minded or the frivolous?

There is no smoke without fire, and I am inclined to believe that this idea of the association of long faces and long prayers is not purely an invention of the enemy. I am afraid that it has a foundation in fact, although it ought not to have; although, indeed, our Lord warns us expressly that even when we fast we should not be as the hypocrites, sad. Some of my older readers may remember the enormous fuss made a number of years ago over two American Evangelists, Messrs. Moody and Sankey, who hired large public halls in London,

where the former played hymns on an excellent harmonium (the sale of harmoniums was the real object of the mission, the unconverted declared), and the latter delivered revivalistic addresses to match. It was with reference to this companionship that the famous Irish Dominican preacher, Father Thomas Burke, is said to have remarked when giving a clergy retreat, "It is not necessary to be Moody in order to be Sankey-monious." Exactly so: true virtue does not consist in a gloomy exterior. But there is almost a school of piety that seems to think so. Perhaps we get infected with that exaggerated solemnity in tone and bearing which we cannot help noting among the clergy of our separated brethren in their public appearances, and which helps to increase—very unjustly, no doubt—the common belief among the vulgar in their insincerity. The man-in-the-street is so quick to suspect hollowness and artifice in the display of religion that he is a hard critic of anything in its professors that goes beyond what he considers honesty and nature. There is in him a conviction, which he may not put into words but is very real all the same, that the more religion estranges itself from ordinary life and, except of course in religious worship and doctrine, adopts unfamiliar intonations and attitudes, the more it is to be distrusted. It is all very well, he says to himself, to answer that these things are mere tricks and conventionalisms, but how did they first spring up, why are they so carefully maintained, what do they rest

upon? It cannot be denied that there is some logic in this objection. We want the man-in-the-street to cease to be the man-in-the-street; occasionally, at any rate, to leave the street and come into the church and make acquaintance with religion. He must be invited, enticed inside. He will never be tempted to enter, if everything within looks dark and cold. Therefore, we do no service to piety, as some persons seem to think, by widening the outward breach between itself and ungodliness. The world to-day, when not one-tenth of the population of London is said to go to church on Sundays, is only too shy of us already; we need to go out into its borders in order to seek the sheep that are lost.

I have hinted that we ourselves may be partly to blame, that we may frighten unreligious people away by sour looks, as they consider them, not directed against them, but worn by us somewhat as religious wear their habit as a garb distinguishing them from ordinary layfolk. And I am led back in this way to the topic with which I started. Can it be that some of God's servants at the present time, for it is with our own times we are concerned of course, do make little outward show of the joy and peace they should be feeling within? We all know how often in the Psalms and elsewhere in Holy Writ we are bidden to be glad; the world congratulates itself, perhaps with reason, on being a brighter, merrier place than in days gone by; is it possible that the religious world is lagging behind in the forward movement and

thinks it good policy to dress in drab and be a sober-sides by way of protest against the levity of its neighbours?

Of one thing we may be assured, that it is not a plan which is likely to succeed, and I say so with confidence because it is not the plan as it seems to me which is followed by the Catholic Church. It surely is manifest that the tendency of the modern legislation of the Church and of her popular devotions, above all of the devotion to our Lord's Sacred Heart is towards gentleness, wise indulgence towards poor human nature. Let me press the attack nearer home, having ventured so far. Is the gloominess of our piety, forgive the word, so entirely on the surface as we like to believe? A well-known effect of mannerisms, even when merely learnt from others and taken up instinctively, as it were, is to react on the person using them; the cultivation of a cold, reserved manner will gradually chill the disposition, and so forth. Our Faith teaches us that God is infinitely good and merciful and dearly loves all His children, nor should we dream of denying or disputing it; but if I have contracted from my early years, whether through misunderstandings or in any other way the habit of addressing Him as though it were presumption out of set times to approach His presence at all, this mannerism, so to call it, though I know the thought is foolish and that He is my Heavenly Father all the while, may make the whole difference to me between a happy and a distressful spiri-

tual life. I sometimes have the thought, which I would not betray to the enemy, I need not say, for worlds, that the light-minded in some respects know us better than we do ourselves and have found us out, and that they are not so very far wrong when they affect to doubt whether we get out of our religion that contentment which it ought to bring us in reward for its restrictions. There is such a thing as breaking with the world on many points and yet not getting possession of God; I do not mean of course not getting possession of God's grace, but not finding that peace and happiness in His service, which is more real and more precious than earth's keenest joys.

What is the matter with us if such is our state? Very possibly we are taking the pleasures of a fervent life too sadly. Stiffness, coldness, exaggerated awe, do not kill indeed the Presence of the Blessed Trinity in the soul, but shut out Its sensible effects of light and warmth. When God invites us to be glad in the recollection of His love for us, of all He has done for us and wishes to do for us both now and hereafter, we turn our eyes away to fix them on our unsatisfactory past, or perhaps our unsatisfactory present, and murmur to ourselves: "How can God love such a 'slacker' as myself? He really can't mean it." When God draws nearer to us we draw back in fear as though we ought to keep our distance lest we be guilty of irreverence. What a parody this is of that happy childlike living with God—the intercourse

of a Father with His children—which was granted to our First Parents in the beginning, when they were allowed to hear the voice of the Lord God walking in Paradise at the afternoon air! We are now in many ways more blest than they; the *felix Adae culpa*, the happy fault of Adam as the Church is not afraid to call it in the morning service of Holy Saturday, deserved to have the Redeemer with whom our union in His Sacrament is immeasurably closer than the strolling of God with His creatures on the lawns of Paradise when the early evening breeze had begun to temper the heat of the sun. God is Light, and Love, and Inexhaustible Joy; His Conversation hath no bitterness nor His Company any tediousness (Wisdom viii. 16): what wonder if His servants are happy in His service. He is glad in our gladness; He would have us joyful rather than sad; He grudges us no holiday if only we take Him everywhere along with us. The world is wrong in believing that it can be happy without Him, but it is sometimes right in suspecting that not all His servants value Him as they ought. Do not let us at least deserve this reproach in our own instance.

VI

IS THE LORD A HARD MAN?

We all remember that one of our Lord's parables in which a servant is made to excuse himself for idleness on the ground that his master was a hard, that is, a grasping man, who wished to reap where he had not sown the seed, and to gather in the grain which he had not winnowed from the chaff. Accordingly this servant would take no risks, and gave back to his lord on his return from his long journey exactly the same sum which had been entrusted to him, no less but no more, for fear of the uncertainties of trade. The excuse was not accepted, and seems indeed only to have made matters worse. His master so little liked being told that he was a hard man, that he called his servant wicked for having done so and seems to have discharged him at once.

Now although no Christian would venture, I hope, to describe Christianity as a hard service, there are "wild and lawless thoughts" that sometimes rise in the brain, "vapours" our great-great-grandmothers would have termed them, which are apt to trouble us. Whatever they may be in themselves, the general effect is depressing, unsettling, lowering. It has been said of the novels of Dumas, the famous author of *The Count of Monte Christo*,

once dear to schoolboys in its English translation, that they left behind them a feeling of dissatisfaction with the existing state of things. You rose from the book discontented, even if religion or morality were not assailed, a sort of poison had been infused into your blood, and you were indignant, rebellious, you could not precisely say why or against what or whom. So at certain periods in the world's history, and perhaps in the history of every individual soul, clouds dim the sky, and we begin to doubt in the darkness whether all is right and whether we have not been mistaken. After all we may have presumed too much on God's forbearance. May it not turn out after all that the Lord *is* a hard man, and will always have his pound of flesh? We are uncomfortable, in ill-humour with everybody and everything. The rebellious mood is upon us, although we have not been reading Dumas. When this is the case, the best plan, I consider, is to face the facts boldly and dare them to do their worst. Then and then only shall we know where we stand. We shall not be the sport of bugbears and fancies because we shall have our feet on solid ground and we shall look steadily at the objects which scare us.

Perhaps our first reason for thinking hard thoughts of God is life's difficulties, in general and in particular: in general, because life is so like the English climate, never to be depended on. The Americans, I believe, deny our right to speak of a climate at all; we have, according to their

view, no weather, nothing better than a mere collection of samples. Did not the great Duke of Wellington when asked by a foreign diplomatist what rule to follow in carrying an umbrella in London make reply: "Carry one, if it is fine; if it is wet, please yourself"? It is the unexpected which always happens on our earthly pilgrimage; we form plans only to get them thwarted, we reckon on results which do not come about, we nurse ambitions which are never gratified, we lean on friends who fail us at the last. And yet we feel it might so easily have been otherwise. We have missed our goal by so very little, or we had all but safely secured our prize when it eluded our grasp. Some disappointments, occasional mischances, we are prepared for, but it is the constant, unvarying course of what a gambler would call bad luck which we cannot understand in our own case. Yet we are told that an Infinite Intelligence and an Infinite Power presides over all human affairs. But we can see no traces of it in ordinary life. On the contrary, caprice seems to rule everywhere on the stage of the great world and in our own private homes. When I need a helping hand, it never seems to be stretched out to me, my prayers are lost on the empty air. If many men are described as godless because of their irreligion, they are so because they can find no way to the God whom they would fain adore.

I have already said that I consider it more truly reverent to examine these bold imaginings than to

endure them unrebuked. They are the microbes of the sceptical atmosphere which we breathe perforce: and we ought to kill them, or to protect ourselves against them if we can. Putting scientific theology and controversy aside, a plain man can, if he will, get a very fair knowledge of his Maker's character, so to call it, from His works. The sky above our heads, glorious in sunshine or faintly lit by moon and stars at night, the earth on which we tread, so soft, so fragrant, so many-hued, stretching out on every side into the illimitable sea—what a house, what a home to build for the human race, for its puny tenants during our life's short span! What profusion, what prodigality, what seeming waste! Some theologians in early times were greatly exercised by the problem. The pathless forests, the rushing rivers, the savannahs of tropical America then almost uninhabited, what use could they have served? The delectation, it was decided, of the Angels, as though pure spirits had an eye for the scenery of earth! A story told of Alexander the Great furnishes us, I consider, with more real help in the difficulty suggested, pagan though he was. One of his soldiers informed him that he was going to be married and was promised by the King an enormous dowry for his bride. The soldier remonstrated, saying that the sum was too large for him to accept. "It is not too large for me to give," answered Alexander. God in His bounty thinks more of what is due to Himself than to His creatures. He cannot be niggardly, He can-

not be mean. His nature is royal, and He is lavish because He is generous. Air, sea, and land are all teeming with life, millions of insects are literally "ephemeral," that is, live only for a day, they constantly die, and are constantly replaced. He is always giving away because He loves to give, it is a pleasure to Him to give. He is overflowing with life and joy and beauty; He is the Source of all true joy and beauty and life, and His one thought and aim is to share His treasure as widely as possible, with as large a number as possible of other beings during time while time lasts, and when time is over on through eternity, since He is Himself Eternal.

What manner of God is this judged by His deeds? Is He in the least likely to be miserly, to be hard? How good a thing it is to be alive! Merely to draw one's breath and feel one's limbs and be abroad in the keen air, using eyes and ears and taste and smell and touch, while we are yet young, and newly risen perhaps, and in good health! God certainly has lodged us rarely well in this world of ours, and all kinds of pleasures, varied, natural, satisfying, are ready to our hand and await our bidding. So happy is life to the innocent and simple, that it has been made almost a ground of complaint against the Creator that its fascinations are a snare in themselves. Certain it is that men are loth to quit it, however much they have blamed it in its course. It looks as if God must be not only profuse but exquisite in all His

works. What was said of Him on earth is true everywhere and always. "He has done all things well." The veining of a leaf which fluttered down at the feet of a saint sent her into an ecstasy by the thought of the love which had shaped it. All great artists put themselves into their works; they are the reflection of themselves; we can read God, His mind, His feelings in the lines and between the lines of His Book, the Universe. To accuse *Him* of being a hard man, who is Infinite Liberality and Goodness and Pity, who has nothing to gain from us, for He is infinitely rich, whereas we must look for everything to Him because we are absolutely poor! No wonder that in the person of the master who went into a far country He should resent with so much heat the charge of greed. He would have more difficulty, it might seem, in meeting the reproach of extravagance and waste.

One of the Restoration poets in the case of a lady generally admired but who did not please his fancy, or perhaps he did not please her's, consoles himself by reflecting, "What care I how fair she be, if she be not fair to me?" In the same spirit I can fancy wrong-headed persons refusing to be convinced that God is good to them, whatever He may be to others with whom they are not concerned. I shrewdly suspect that the servant who received one talent was a bit of a curmudgeon himself and a disagreeable fellow to live with. We see ourselves in others oftener than we suppose. We throw forward upon them a shadow of our own

weakness and mistake for their voice what is really only an echo of our own. It was he and not his lord who was the hard man. We envy others the special gifts of nature or of grace which they have received, we exaggerate their happiness, we forget their cares, we regard them as the favourites of heaven or the spoiled children of fortune, and they perhaps all the while are bewailing their unhappy lot. Let us come home to ourselves, about whom we can know the truth better than the affairs of our neighbours. Let us examine our own experience of God's dealings with us in the past. Of inequalities in worldly advantages I do not speak, both because they are inevitable, as things are, and because they are not of primary importance for happiness either in this world or in the next. The prayer in the Book of Proverbs is: "Give me neither beggary nor riches: give me only the necessaries of life" (Prov. xxx. 8). The earth is more than big enough to hold and to feed its creatures; the essential and the greater pleasures of life are equally open to all; it is man's oppression or injustice or greed which denies them to many.

Then, is the Lord a hard man to us in the endowments of the soul? No one recalling his own career can honestly say so. We find bad habits of temper or uncharitableness or worse things installed within us. Turn back upon them the lamp of memory steadily, widely, so as to bring into view all attendant circumstances and light up God's admonitions and inspirations as well as our own perversity. Try

to recollect how often the voice of conscience has striven to make itself heard, in gentle whispers first of all and then in loud remonstrance or remorse, until quelled at last it has seemed to die in sobs or in murmurs far away. How many fires of noble purpose have been lit in your soul by stirring words or great examples, or suddenly in the strangest fashion in most unexpected places or most unlikely times by the Holy Spirit, who alone can touch the inmost heart, and afterwards have burnt low and then to ashes because you would take no pains to feed them! St. Paul says he was not "disobedient to the heavenly vision." We indeed have no claim to such a wonder as wrought his conversion, but I believe that glimpses of the Unseen, and high impulses and yearnings for better things, not the work of imagination but of the God "in whom we live and move and have our being" are not so uncommon as is often fancied in these days of ours, perhaps because there are so many lying spirits abroad just now seeking to deceive us. The Lord is not a hard man, but in the words of the prophet Joel, "gracious and merciful, patient and rich in mercy, and ready to repent of the evil." Do not then call Him hard or harsh or close-fisted by nature; you can by your treatment of Him make Him what you will. Believe Him to be gentle, kind, generous and compassionate beyond the tenderness of the most devoted mother, and you will find your anticipations fall infinitely short of the truth. The one thing that He cannot bear is that you should mistrust His love.

VII

EMMANUEL: GOD WITH US

Before this month has ended we shall again be welcoming among us our Infant God, and we cannot doubt that each succeeding Christmas renews in some real sense the special blessings associated with the first. The time therefore seems suitable for a few reflections on the new era then opened for the world. We speak of the light of Christianity, indeed Christ calls Himself the Light of the World, and that light has now been shining for nearly 2,000 years. We have been born into a world for so long brightened and warmed by its beams. If Abraham rejoiced that he might see even in spirit Christ's day, and saw it and was glad, how much more favoured are we in the place assigned to us in the centuries by the Providence of God.

That one word *Emmanuel*, or those three words of its English translation, ought to sum up for us, if we understand them aright, the purpose and happiness of life: *God with us* and *we with God*, as far as the conditions of our human existence will permit; in that we have everything that makes life worth living. Either side of the diptych, of the two-leaved picture which would portray a per-

fect life, might profitably be gazed upon by us almost without ceasing. It is indeed the same picture only looked at from different points of view. To-day, however, we must fix our eyes on one point alone, we will think less of *God with us* than of *ourselves with God*. I am afraid that there are people who are already beginning to get frightened, who do not at all like the idea of being left alone, as it were, with God. The Israelites in the desert begged, we remember, that God would not speak to them directly Himself, but rather through the mouth of His servant Moses. But that was under the Old Dispensation. Besides they were terrified by the rolling of the thunder and the flashing of the lightning round Mount Sinai. Our lot is cast in happier days. God has bowed the heavens and come down lower even than a mountain top, into a cave at midnight, heralded by no sudden storm, and the sweet voices of the Angels breathe the joy and peace of which they sing. The inward meaning of the Creator descending to live with us is to teach us how to live with Him. Let me try to draw this out in some detail lest I be thought merely to use high-flown words without any application to practical life.

At the commencement of my day, then, I try as soon as I can to get into touch—if I may reverently say so—with God. My morning prayers, be they long or short, be they no more than a reminder to myself of gratitude to my Maker for having preserved me during the night which has now

ushered in another dawn, tell me so much at least. I have, or I can choose to have, a little quiet time before the daily round begins; I can peer into its darkness as into the streets or country which surround me, without venturing into them or it as yet. I stand, as it were, on the brink of the new day as I might upon a shore or headland facing the great sea. All the cares and trials which await me are as yet unknown to me, or at any rate are suspended by God's power; they cannot harm me yet. I may not perhaps be able to chase them away, but I can prepare for them, I can make for myself a Friend who will accompany me through them step by step, who can and will, if I do not fail Him, always guide me, always uphold me, in whom I can trust unreservedly, and who is so generous that even while He has no need of me and I have every need of Him, He actually regards my leaning upon Him as a favour done by me to Him and is most anxious to reward me for obeying what is not only my duty but the dictates of my own interest and advantage. All this I can now tranquilly contemplate, because the world or my portion of the world and my business in it is not yet astir, and I may therefore form my plans or make my resolutions, undisturbed by the creaking and jars of the huge human machinery once it fairly starts. What a maze life is, or if I must stick to the metaphor I have already used, of how many wheels and then wheels within wheels and intricate parts it is composed! Even if my own little

"bit" seems insignificant and its very sameness is my trouble, no two days are ever exactly alike, taken throughout their whole length; and if they produce no fresh incidents, how changeable are my fellow-creatures, how changeable am I myself! I ought therefore to feel the need with each returning sun of bracing myself to meet its fortunes and to quit myself in them like a man. *Ay, there's the rub.*

In what thoughts can I find inspiration and comfort at the top of the morning in drear December? In *God with us* and therefore *we with God.* My day's march has been carefully mapped out for me, "before Abraham was made," in the Divine counsels, its windings allowed for, the ambushes of my enemies forestalled. I may be quite assured against surprises or superior force, if only I leave myself unhesitatingly in the hands of God. And then what a fine thing it is, enough to stir one's pulses at a suitable time and place, but true even when one is not in an enthusiastic mood, to know that the feeblest of us *has* a bit to do, a work to accomplish, under a commission, not signed by earthly emperor or king, but from the Sovereign of Heaven itself! Further, every weary pace I count, if it so be that the way is long or tedious, is taken under the eyes of Him for whose sake I have begun the march and who will at its end give me a rich reward.

Grumpy late-risers, or perhaps unwilling early-risers also, will urge their objections to this, as they

may consider it, elevated strain, unsuited to the matter-of-fact and dreadfully busy century which we inhabit. Napoleon I. is reported to have thought meanly of any courage which was not "two o'clock in the morning" courage, at which hour most people, even if they are not abed, are distinctly not of a martial temper. A man whose nerves are strong two hours after midnight is a man who does not borrow his bravery from any accidental adjuncts, but has it locked up in his own bosom, ready for all occasions. In the same way it may be argued that we cannot greatly help ourselves to deal with our daily worries by a repetition of sublime thoughts which we blink at through half-opened eyes as soon as we have dressed or despatched our breakfasts. If "sublime thoughts" meant "thoughts in the air," having no relation to practical life, such unreal imaginings as visionaries are supposed to dwell upon, these unsubstantial fancies would of course be no preparation for the hard facts of life, and no protection against their power. But a recollection of what we men are, and what we have been set down upon this planet for, without any action of our own (for we could not have been consulted before we had begun to exist), is not sublimity but common sense. To steady ourselves day by day, before we commence our appointed task, by tightening our grasp of life's inner purpose, is only to imitate the captain of a ship who, having ascertained that his vessel is well fitted and ready for sea, might put his telescope

to his eyes to see if all was clear ahead and what course he ought to follow. I cannot help feeling that even a brief survey of this sort, however general and informal, can wonderfully soothe and *tone* the mind, to say nothing of the Divine blessing which it would invoke on our day.

It is not really difficult to accustom ourselves to some such anticipation of our work as I have described, a kind of layman's *Matins*, but not a set form of words, only a letting of the mind dwell on appropriate topics, an easy musing upon the things which make life noble or base. It will do no harm if it occurs to us to forearm ourselves against what experience has shewn us to be our own special dangers, whether within us, in our own temperament, or in our little world without, looking closely as it were to our arms and equipment before we descend into the arena. It is remarked, I believe, by persons who have plenty of time and a turn for these investigations that ladies, when they do not carry little pocket-mirrors about with them for secret use, are extraordinarily ingenious in utilizing any reflecting surfaces they happen to pass, in order to discover whether the details of their dress are quite as they ought to be. I am not a person of observation, and yet I am afraid that I have before now detected some dandies of my own sex engaged in a similar occupation. Why should we not all take a good look at ourselves in the glass of the Eternal Truths before we apply ourselves to the business of life?

And so our day opens, and we are soon, if we be earnest workers, engrossed in "whatever our hand has found to do." Holy Scripture itself bids us to "do it with all our might." We become so busy, that for a while at least this world seems to be everything to us and the next world has faded out of sight. Once immersed it appears impossible for us to raise our heads above the current, and we drift or are carried forward hour after hour until lunch or something else intervenes: and after the interval we return refreshed to work, which has grown more interesting or perhaps more distasteful even than before, but, whichever be the case, has no natural tendency to recall our morning motto of *Emmanuel*, or of *We with God*. This is not an unfaithful picture of our ordinary day. And now what is there to be said about it? If it be wrong or mistaken, how can it be mended? Probably no great change is possible in a moment. Habit is overcome by habit. It is not precisely wrong to lose oneself so entirely in one's business that we think of nothing else. Some kinds of business require our undivided attention, and except by a supernatural gift cannot be transacted without it. On the other hand, these instances are comparatively rare, and, as a matter of fact, it is likely that the quality of our output would be improved by occasional pauses in our labour. To halt for a few seconds or minutes during an anxious piece of work often rests and clears the head. Why should the thoughts of God, His goodness, our need

of His assistance, or our fervent wishes for the welfare of those dear to us, and therefore our supplications for them to the throne of grace, be unsuitable at such times? No painful effort, no strain would be needed or desirable. If after a little practice we were to find the attempt a strain, would not this alone prove to us how much we have yet to learn about the proper method of intercourse with God—how stiff and formal, inelastic and cold our own way is, so unlike the conversation of a child with his Father and therefore so unlike the model of prayer taught us by our Lord Himself. God is always at our elbow, God is always in our heart, God encompasses us on every side. He reads all our thoughts, He intimately knows every aspiration, every fear, every hope of our soul. He understands us without any need of our explanation, He can supply the answer to the problems which perplex ourselves. Why do we not consult Him more, open our hearts to His love, lean on Him in our weakness, implore His succour in our wants? He has not shrunk from abasing Himself to earth in order to share my human toils and troubles and trials; and shall I refuse His company, as far as I can, and deny Him my confidences and reject His friendship? If He loves to be with me, my answer must be, above all at this Christmastide, that I desire to love to be with Him.

VIII

STANDING IN OUR OWN LIGHT

It seems strange that poor weak creatures like ourselves should be able to tie the Hands of the Almighty God; and yet we can and, I am afraid, frequently do so. I am not referring to the power of prayer by which we can stay God's anger, which otherwise might fall on ourselves or on others. In fact I am not thinking of any of the ways whereby we can help ourselves in the service of God, but on the contrary of how we may without being aware of it do ourselves a great deal of harm. God, we know, never forces our free will, He never puts on us such a pressure that we cannot resist, and that is why He is able to reward us for our good actions in this world. We do His Will because we choose to follow it, and therefore we truly earn Heaven by the sweat of our brow. It is indeed a recompense infinitely greater than the work done to win it: and if He had so pleased He might have commanded our labour without giving us any wage; but in His goodness He has made a bargain with us, immeasurably to our advantage, and He will be faithful to His part of the treaty if we are faithful to ours.

God then never constrains us, He allures us but

He always leaves us free, indeed He wishes to enlarge our freedom as far as possible, because the more willing is our obedience the more honourable it is to Him and to us: "God loves a cheerful giver," St. Paul says. God will not curtail our liberty; but, as I have already said, we may curtail His, we may interfere with His merciful purposes regarding us. We may practically force Him to treat us in a way which is not what He would prefer; and therefore we may be said practically to tie His Hands.

Have you ever, gentle reader, in the springtime made your way through the bushes, or perhaps even climbed a tree to reach a nest and then peered into it (I hope you did no more!) and seen how wide the little birds opened their beaks in hope of a worm or two which you had forgotten to bring? Possibly your bird-nesting days are over, or your dignity is offended at being asked to consider so childish an illustration in the midst of a serious subject. I cannot help that; I am in fact only borrowing a figure from the Psalmist, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Ps. lxxx. 11). We do not open our mouths wide enough to receive God's grace, and that is why they are not filled. Our Blessed Lady tells us in her Magnificat, "He hath filled the hungry with good things: and the rich He hath sent empty away." The rich, I suppose, in this passage only means those who think that they are well-fed already, and therefore have no appetite for spiritual good things. There are

two persons concerned in our sanctification, God and ourselves, and they must work together. If they do not, or do not work harmoniously, no great result can be achieved. There can never be any fault on God's side: if things go amiss we are always to blame. For instance, God has a plan by which I am in course of time to be fitted to play an important part in the walk of life in which His Providence has placed me. But if I refuse to fall in with this design and am bent instead on a little scheme of my own, no real good comes of either, for neither can succeed. God will not overbear my opposition, and, naturally, I cannot overcome His. I cannot indeed gain my ends against His wishes; but I can defeat His wishes if I choose. *I can stand in my own light,* and by my perversity do myself more harm than the world, the flesh and the devil all combined, as long as I do not range myself on their side. How is this possible? I hope in a few words to make the matter, or at any rate my meaning clear.

Our Father in heaven loves us most tenderly and desires to do us all manner of good. He loves us because He created us, He has every reason for bringing His handiwork to higher and higher perfection, and He has no reason for grudging us anything, because He is infinitely rich, and it would be ridiculous to think of the creature being a rival to the Creator. All that He wants of us, all that He asks of us and that He must ask from the very nature of the case, is that we will not thwart Him,

that we will let Him do His own work in His own way. That seems to be, and indeed is, very little to ask, but, unfortunately, it is not so simple in practice as it looks.

We know our fellow-creatures and we understand them—perhaps I ought to say, we think we do—they are of our own size and our own nature. We have lived with them and learnt their limitations, and can, usually at least, guess with tolerable accuracy what they are likely to think or say or do in given circumstances. But what do we really know (we are apt to say) about the Eternal God? How can we gauge His feelings? How can we make conjectures about His Mind? We are afraid to leave ourselves in the hands of the Heavenly Titan if only because He is so great, infinitely greater than we. Not only does He tower to the clouds, but He pierces the clouds, and, if we are to speak of Him in material terms, immeasurably beyond. We handle a butterfly carefully lest we bruise its wings. How can God touch us ever so slightly, ever so delicately, and not grind us to powder? That is why He stoops so low to our feebleness and takes us up so tenderly for fear of crushing us, and speaks to us not with His voice of thunder (Apoc. vi. 1) lest He deafen us, but as it were of a gentle wind. But, do what He will, our poor restless hearts flutter when we think Him near, and we can understand how the Israelites could have said to Moses: "Speak thou to us and we will hear: let not the Lord speak to us lest

we die." We look out with our human eyes, which cannot see very far or very clear, into the counsel of God, and is it strange that our image of it is imperfect and distorted, belittled down to our own littleness, narrowed down to our own narrowness of soul? This is the key to half our difficulties. Why do we find God capricious? Because we are capricious ourselves. A train at rest seems to be moving to another that dashes past it at full speed. So we attribute to the Immutable God the fickleness of our own moods. We have a headache and are cross. Therefore God must be cross too. He must be displeased with us, because we are displeased with ourselves! We are cold or hungry or tired, and we translate these states of body into meaning that God has ceased to love us or looks askance upon us or is bored with our company.

Let me use another illustration: if I place myself by any clumsiness between the source of light and what I want to see, of course my shadow is thrown upon it, and I obtain a cheap *silhouette* of myself, but at the cost of the visibility of the object. *I am standing in my own light.* In the same way I unwittingly interpose myself between God's light (vouchsafed to me in prayer or at other times) and God Himself, and I mistake my own shadow for the Divine Beauty. I am not so much contemplating the Deity as myself. I am unfortunately selfish and mean and unforgiving and dreadfully suspicious, and I cannot believe that the qualities which exist in myself are not also to be

found in God. I am judging God by myself; I am reading my own petty thoughts into the Divine Mind. A moment's reflection will shew us how terrible a mistake this is, how fatal to all worthy conceptions of God and therefore to any noble enthusiasm in His service. I verily believe that this error has done more than any other of our day to chill fervent spirits and to sicken loyal hearts that would otherwise have beaten high with the love of the Master. We have unconsciously dragged our God down to our own level, made Him in our imagination as petty and as unlovable as we are ourselves, and have then been surprised that we do not feel it easy to burn with devotion to our Father whom we have misunderstood.

And yet we must not be too hard on ourselves, we must not forget to be fair. After all, if left to ourselves, we can see only through human eyes, and it is natural for us to measure the Deity by our own standards because we have no others. We are not blameworthy in this, we cannot raise ourselves above ourselves, nor does God require us to do so. Our help is not in ourselves, but in God. His complaint against us is that we will not accept His proffered aid. He will lift us up from the dunghill and place us with princes, if we do not obstinately plant our feet on the earth and refuse to budge: He will strengthen our eyes to see if we do not keep them firmly closed; if we will open our mouths He will gladly fill them. We shall know by experience that "the Lord our God is gracious and

merciful, patient and rich in mercy, and ready to repent of the evil," if only we give Him a trial. In truth the decision lies not with Him but with us. In our spiritual concerns even more than in our worldly ones "nothing venture" means "nothing have." God has done so much for us—can we do nothing for Him? Can we not trust His word, and abandon ourselves to His guidance? Shall we not be safe in His Everlasting Arms, and are we not to hope in the shadow of His Wings? (Ps. lvi. 2).

IX

THE ART OF RESTING

In these strenuous times anyone who cares can find employment, although not perhaps at his own price. In fact, medical men tell us that it is overwork, overdoing it against which we ought principally to be on our guard. Hence, brain-fag, irritability, and that mysterious disease comprehensively known as "nerves" take their rise, and, as always happens, the demand has created the supply. A new department has practically been added to the healing art, and Harley Street now opens its doors to mind-specialists and brain-specialists and experts on the nervous system, who have many patients whom they treat with, well, perhaps varying success. The patients blame the doctors and the doctors blame the patients, just the same as in the good old-fashioned diseases, and quite in the good old way—who shall settle the quarrel between them?

To step down from the level of the orthodox in medicine, not to say in religion, not so *very* far from Farm Street itself more than one building devoted to Christian Science rears its handsome front and avows its belief that the whole thing is a huge

mistake, and that there ought not to be such persons as patients or doctors at all! It may seem a little over-bold amidst this hubbub of voices to offer any advice, even free of charge, but the subject itself is so intensely, almost painfully practical, that we venture to put upon paper some thoughts concerning it. Even if in a multitude of counsellors there is not safety at any rate there is the chance of fresh suggestions. Let us take it for granted, then, that we are in need of rest, how and where are we to look for it? Haply this very "taking it for granted" is in itself a step too far forward, and brings us upon debatable ground, for how am I to know that I really do want a rest and that I am not simply yielding to laziness or to the blandishments of over-anxious friends? What are the signs, the unmistakeable symptoms of this ailment? It is quite true that my distractions during time of prayer have greatly increased of late, that I find spiritual reading dreadfully insipid and tame, and my old zest for works of mercy seems to be vanishing day by day. I used to look forward to my frequent Communions for strength and comfort, and now I perform them as a duty rather than a pleasure, and I am beginning to doubt whether they may not become for me mere matters of routine.

In this perplexity of mind I turn to spiritual manuals, and behold I find my own portrait drawn to the life. I am quickly falling, or rather I have already fallen into that shocking condition of the

interior life which is denominated *tepidity*, which is all the more alarming because it hides unknown terrors and because all the authorities do not appear to agree as to what exactly it consists in. How can I be sure that I am not an unwilling but still a guilty victim of this influenza of the spirit to which in its own sphere as many consequences can be traced as to the corresponding malady of the body?

Fortunately a maxim which is of constant application in philosophical and also in theological matters here comes most opportunely to our aid. It may be freely translated: *Don't be fond of far-fetched explanations.* If one cause will account for an effect, don't go in search of two. Don't drag in the supernatural where the natural will suffice. Don't put down your "aridities" (high-sounding word!) to the account of obsession or special visitation by God until you have tried in vain for some simpler source. It will be time enough to think of exorcisms when more obvious expedients have hopelessly failed. Thus before convincing yourself that you are out of favour with God and that He is punishing you by darkness, why not make some obvious experiments to find out whether it is not you yourself who are standing in your own light. You complain that your soul is out of sorts. Perhaps your body, your mind is out of sorts as well, and it is the soul which is suffering from its contact with the body, and not the other way round. You have passed a bad night from whatever cause and have

hurried some distance to attend your daily Mass, you arrive hot and tired, and cannot fix your mind on the sacred rite, you go up almost mechanically to the altar rails after the *Domine, non sum dignus*, and do not make a cold Thanksgiving simply because you do not make a Thanksgiving at all. You are in a dream, or only half awake. When you return to your home and throw your mind back upon the morning, your time in church seems to have been one long distraction. This surely spells tepidity, if tepidity there be.

Not a bit of it! It spells bodily discomfort, and bodily weakness, either passing or constitutional. It has nothing to do with the will, the set purpose of the soul to which alone God attends. If that purpose holds firm our thoughts may wander where they list, they cannot withdraw us from God; the wind may blow about our hair or necktie or coat, but we shall reach our journey's end in spite of it if we keep on our way. And we do keep on our way if from beginning to end we have in view one only aim—to please God, to benefit our soul. Fits of inattention, which indeed are hardly conscious and are not wholly wilful, which amidst the stir and movement of a body of people are almost inevitable, do not seriously interfere with our master-thought. We have come to pay homage to our God at the cost of no little inconvenience to ourselves, and He gladly welcomes us, not as seraphs, but as poor human creatures, men and women with bodies of clay, with no wings of our own to lift

us above the earth whence we have sprung and whither we shall return. Is it likely, is it conceivable, that at such moments as these our Father who is in Heaven, but also in every part of earth, should be prying to discover whether and how far our imaginations may have strayed from Him, although He knows that He possesses our hearts?

Unless I am greatly mistaken, these considerations have an important bearing on a kindred topic, itself also the subject of much heart-searching, that is, meditation. There are, I suppose, few persons, even those who (to adopt the formula of the Garden of the Soul) "though living in the world yet aspire to devotion," to whom the practice of some sort of meditation is not familiar, and, I was going to add, sometimes penitential. It ought to be the refreshment of the soul, soothing, strengthening, enlightening. How far in many cases it answers or does not answer these expectations I do not propose now to inquire. My only business is to point out that meditation may be greatly helped or hindered by sound or unsound notions on the management of the mind in prayer. And into that management the "art of resting" enters largely. The mind is the most delicate of instruments, the hair-spring of a watch is coarse by the side of it, and yet we cudgel it and twist it and over-fatigue it, and are surprised if it shews the traces of our own mishandling. Surely our first concern in beginning a meditation, for instance, ought to be that our minds are fresh for their work,

like the coursers that according to the Greek mythology drew the chariot of the sun. Sleepy heads, jaded brains, are a poor preparation for the business of this life, and are at even a greater disadvantage in dealing with the next, because spiritual things are of their nature more shadowy and more difficult to grasp.

Racehorses, as we know, are not sent to the post until they were judged perfectly fit. I wish we had the wit or the opportunity to behave as well towards the faculties of our mind before engaging in converse with God. Of course, it must be confessed that it is the lack of opportunity which is not infrequently to blame. Perforce we start our prayer tired and unrested; what are we then to do? Flog our willing but worn-out steeds? Accuse ourselves of sloth and negligence? Not so. This plan, although, unfortunately, not uncommon with fervent souls, will only make the mischief greater and perhaps lasting and incurable. Gently, steadily, place before the mind the fare provided for it; but if it will have none of it, grow not angry, be not discouraged. Drop the reins on the necks of your coursers and let them take their own road or no road, your attempts to control them will not only be useless but will make them more restive: they will almost pull your arms out of their sockets, but your violence will do more harm than good. What is needed is to ease the strain, whereas you are doing your best to increase it.

Misunderstood tags about the importance of

never yielding to temptation keep buzzing in your ears, or you think faintly of St. Aloysius' persisting until he could spend one consecutive hour in prayer without a single distraction, and you rightly conclude that you are more likely to imitate him in his constant headaches than in his wonderful union with God. The matter is exceedingly simple if only you would see it. *Rest your mind* and perhaps your body also. God in the centre of your heart knows that you want to serve Him, your distractions do not distract Him, He is nearer to you than they, and He understands that they are no part of your real self. They are the offspring of that mortal body which by His own permission weighs down the soul. He is content with your goodwill, and if He is satisfied why are not you?

X

SOME PROBLEMS OF PRAYER

I have no intention of attempting here a Treatise or Tract on prayer from the ascetical point of view, but wish only to have a chat with the indulgent reader on some points which the subject naturally suggests—elementary points perhaps, but such, so it seems to me, as easily get lost sight of. I begin then by recalling the often-quoted remark supposed to be made by a farmer after listening on Sunday to his clergyman's request for prayers for rain—"What is the sense of parson's asking for rain while the wind is in the east?" We all see the meaning of the objection, and in some degree we feel its force. To ask God to send us rain while the wind holds in its present quarter is to beg for impossibilities. And we all of us can also see after a moment's thought the proper answer: if the rain is to come, God will first change the wind's direction. The gibe attributed to Napoleon: *God is always on the side of the big battalions*, expresses the same idea in another form. The advantage of numbers will decide the day among troops otherwise evenly matched, and is a presage of victory in the same way as an east wind foretells dry

weather. To the great soldier and to the farmer alike it would seem preposterous to expect God to intervene in existing conditions. Is it too much to say that there is floating in many minds an atmosphere of this kind, in which our objects of prayer shew bright or dim, hopeful or hopeless, according to our fancies of the difficulty of attaining them—on a sort of graduated scale, of our own making, whereby we set them down as within our reach, or possibly within our reach, or outside our reach altogether? We constitute ourselves judges whether what we desire from God is a small matter or a matter of great importance, and reckon up our chances on that supposition and fall, I fear, in consequence into many mistakes.

There is a natural connection between the wind and rain, and a farmer in his ideas about it is at any rate on his own subject, and has a right to his own opinion; a general, too, is an authority upon the value of superior forces; but often enough, particularly when our petitions are for spiritual graces, like children we babble words which we do not fully understand. Our Lord's rebuke to the sons of Zebedee is applicable to us also, although in a different sense: *we know not what we ask.* I cannot help feeling that a few more words on this point may not be amiss. When then we, who are by nature mere dust and ashes, venture even by His express command to raise our eyes and our voice to our Maker, our first difficulty will naturally be, if we are not merely repeating prayers

by rote, to accustom ourselves as it were to the novelty of the position and to overcome the feeling of awe which it would naturally produce. It seems hardly credible that the Highest could stoop to interest Himself in our trivial affairs, and the mere thought of His doing so at first fills us with more fear than consolation. We find it hard to take quite literally His gracious words inviting us to beg of Him any favour whatsoever: and in our confusion we experience almost a feeling of relief in putting in reservations and restrictions of our own to make, as it were, His generosity more suitable to our littleness, shading with our hands the light of His goodness that our weak eyes may be able to bear it.

Further, to pray, to put ourselves in communication with God, is to enter into another world with which we are totally unacquainted, utterly unlike our own, having immense spaces, as it seems, in which we may lose ourselves and wander on aimlessly, fruitlessly, without any end. It is making an excursion, while we still remain in the flesh, into the land of the spirit, of infinity, of eternity, of reality—although we conceive of it as of shadows, —dwelt in by God, and penetrated with His Presence a thousand times more intimately than the earth on which we stand. There all things are on a scale beyond our human ken—joys, as well, alas! as sorrows—all is great, all is complete, all is lasting. Here nothing is perfect, nothing contents us, everything passes. What wonder that as soon as in

prayer we cross the frontiers of this universe, when we strive to "raise our minds and hearts to God," we are apt to take with us the fetters of the prison-house which we have just quitted! It is not in any case easy to ascend so high, to call a truce even for a few short minutes to the distractions of this lower world, but it is harder still not to take with us our habitual methods of thought and feeling. It is they, probably even more than our sins, which make our intercourse with God so constrained, so hesitating. Let us suppose all impediments of fear or remorse removed, there still lingers a feeling of strangeness, of shyness in finding ourselves amid such unusual surroundings. I know how to address my fellow-man, how to keep up a conversation with him, what arguments to use to him when I wish to convince him, what topics to get upon, what topics to avoid, but how am I to conduct an interview with my Creator? The very pomposity of the phrase only too well illustrates the character of mind from which it is supposed to emanate. I am afraid that we shall not make much of prayer if we come to it in this spirit, and yet who can deny that it is abroad, and that it is one reason why prayer is not a more popular exercise, and is regarded by many persons with a mixture of weariness and despair? My own idea is that the age is getting too philosophical and that what we need is more simplicity in our relations with God. Of course it is quite true that He is raised above us higher than the heavens above the earth, that He is

and must always remain infinitely beyond our understanding, simply because He is Infinite and Eternal, whereas we are dust and creatures of time. Be it so; let us leave it so. We shall one day understand all that it is possible to be understood about the Incomprehensible Deity.

But meanwhile we shall only bewilder our poor minds by becoming "searchers of majesty and be overwhelmed by glory" (Prov. xxv. 2), and shall strain our eyes to no purpose in peering into the light inaccessible wherein God dwells, but which to our sight is as thickest darkness. Our farmer friend laughed at prayer as producing rain, because he thought that he knew better, the parching east wind must hold up the clouds; Napoleon had no fear of a scanty foe, since experience had taught him the value of numbers, although he learnt a lesson afterwards when Jack Frost forced the muskets from his soldiers' grasp during the retreat from Moscow. "Can the excommunication of Pius VII.," the conqueror had asked, "make my brave soldiers drop their guns?" He made the same mistake as the Briton of limiting the power of Providence to his own experience of it, even if either of them ever seriously considered the likelihood of Divine interference in weather or battle at all. To be sure we devout Catholics are in a different case: we fully admit the theory of the possibility of God's coming to our aid in consequence of prayer, and yet we hang back and get nervous and falter, when we should most of all be

bold in preferring our petitions. How is this to be explained?

I greatly fear, although it may seem harsh to say so, that we too are apt to be impressed by the prevalence of the east wind, and would feel more confident of victory if we could count on considerable reserves at our back; in other words, we put little heart into our prayers because we have little real hope that they will be granted. It is here as I have already said that our lack of simplicity comes in. We cannot understand, we cannot even imagine, how what we pray for can be brought about in existing circumstances—how some blow we dread can be turned aside, or how our will can ever be steeled to follow the right; and we forget that circumstances exist only by God's permission, and can be changed by Him in a moment if He wills. There is a deep lesson for us all in our Lord's frequent practice as we read it in the Gospels, of questioning those who begged His help whether they truly believed He could perform what they required. We are told that He wrought not many miracles in His own country because of the unbelief of its inhabitants. They could not take away His infinite power, but they could and did extinguish His desire to exercise it on their behalf. May we not in this critical age be too inquisitive about God's methods in governing His own universe, and think to shew our own cleverness in raising difficulties which are born only of our own ignorance? How will God convert England, or

end the present war? We do not know, and probably the less we speculate upon His hidden counsels on such matters the more fervently we shall implore His mercy. We pray because He bids us pray, He does not bid us inquire into "the times and moments which the Father hath put in His own power."

The truth is that it is we ourselves who make our prayers ineffectual. It is not that we, like the frogs in the fable, try to puff ourselves out to the size of bulls, but that, exactly the contrary, we reduce the dimensions of our petitions to our own proportions. We regulate our dealings with God as if He were a creature like ourselves. Being used to coppers ourselves we find it natural to manage our transactions with Him in the same coinage and measure them by the same standard. As a small tradesman in the East End, a grocer or a fruiterer, would stand aghast and think we were joking if we gave him an order for goods to the value of thousands of pounds, so we expect God to be astonished if we ask Him for big graces. What is the pattern set before us in the Lord's Prayer? We are at once placed, if I may reverently say so, at God's point of view instead of our own. We are bidden to ask that His Name should be hallowed, that His Kingdom should come, that His Will should be done on earth as well as in heaven—not, observe, in any particular country or parish, but the wide world over. Every one of us, however miserable, however sinful, has these words put into

his mouth. There follows indeed, as is right and proper, a supplication for our own individual needs. But we have first been taught in what the essence of prayer resides, what prayer really means, the entrance, that is, into the Presence-Chamber of the Eternal God, to whom all things are subject, whose Eyes survey the whole earth. With Him all things are possible. When we speak to Him who holds in His Hands the threads of all creation, who is All-Wise and All-Powerful, whose Will no one can withstand, it is ridiculous to talk of difficulties except those of our own making. We can ask for too little, we cannot ask for too much. We can pray for a single conversion; He who died for all would like us to beg His mercy upon all whom He has redeemed. A man may be known by his prayers, I do not mean by their length but by their character, as it were by their tone. Our prayers are an expression of ourselves: if they are large and hopeful and buoyant, they reflect an intimacy with God and a trust in His goodness to which nothing can be refused. We cannot think too well of God; we cannot overrate His liberality.

XI

AN ORDINARY LIFE

It is not difficult to find models for peculiar forms of life, for careers that lie a little or far outside the beaten track. Their very singularity is their attraction and their charm. But where are we to look for help and sanction when we have to own, sorrowfully perhaps, perhaps only after a long time, that our lot on earth is a very humble one, and our destiny, to all human seeming, very obscure? Who will be the patron of the humdrum and commonplace? What saint will not disdain as clients simply the average man or the average woman? It is our good fortune to be able to discover exactly the pattern we want in no less a personage than the foster-father of our Lord: and perhaps our discontent with our own narrow life, for I am afraid that the average man or woman is apt to be discontented as a rule, will be a little eased if we can find examples of as great or greater hardships in the case of another. In fact our trouble when we try to put before ourselves St. Joseph's life at Nazareth after his return with the Child Jesus and His Mother from Egypt, is not so much to pick out in it some stretches of

dullness with which to compare our own, as to find anything in it which, to the modern mind, would seem to be interesting at all. One day must have been very like another in the one street of the little mountain village of Nazareth. Its inhabitants were few, and for some reason, which we do not now clearly understand, had a bad name among their neighbours. So Nathaniel asked: "Can anything of good come from Nazareth?" Except at the yearly recurring festivals, it is unlikely that the members of the Holy Family went any distance from home or received visitors from afar. Even if Nazareth had any little community life of its own, some ruling body, some head, there can have been few matters to discuss and nothing of any great importance to settle. In these politics, as far as we know, Joseph did not meddle and certainly took no leading part. When our Lord first began His public life, and everyone was inquiring who and what He was, the answer given represented Him as the Son of Mary and a carpenter about whom nothing appeared to be known except the fact of his trade. All day long, with two intervals for meals, Joseph plied his tools in the shed near his one-storied house, helped by Jesus as the Boy grew up—carefully, seriously, not as a means of killing time, but because the Boy knew well He must be His mother's support after His foster-father's death. Mary would often bring her work in the cool of the evening, for no one was idle of the holiest Three upon earth, and they would

lighten their toil by loving converse until the sun went down. Their talk never ran on mere village gossip, although they entered fully into the cares and sorrows of their neighbours and were fain to relieve them. Indeed, the wheels of life turned slowly in Nazareth, according to our notions of to-day. I am afraid that we should have thought it a sleepy place, in which nothing was stirring, nothing was doing, nothing was ever happening that made any matter. As for the great world outside its cup—for Nazareth was shaped, we are told, something like the petals of a rose—probably Nazareth troubled its head about it just as little as the world troubled about Nazareth itself. There had been, to be sure, one notable exception, when Roman officials had come to warn Joseph and Mary that they must go up to Bethlehem to be enrolled in the census in the days of Cæsar Augustus. But that was a long time ago, and ever since Rome had left the obscure hamlet to sleep in peace as before. These were the days when there were no railroads, no motors, no telegraphs, no telephones; no newspapers existed in our sense of the word, men therefore knew very little of what occurred beyond their own tiny plot of earth; as a rule they died and were buried at no great distance from the place where they were born. They made few acquaintances, they had few friends—I am, of course, speaking throughout on the scale of the present time—they read no books, for the best of reasons, because there were none to read: manu-

scripts were rare and costly, and consequently belonged only to the few. Suppose we try to throw ourselves back in imagination into this ancient Eastern world as it once existed, although it has now passed nearly two thousand years away. Fancy ourselves set on the slope of Nazareth, *condemned* (a child of the modern spirit would unhesitatingly say) to spend a lifetime, or a year, or a month, in such surroundings. By climbing to the brow of the hillside we could indeed command a noble view—Libanus and Hermon crowned with perpetual snow on the north, Mount Thabor and the Jordan valley on the east, Carmel on the west, and the glittering sea. But few men can live only on the most glorious of views, even if they have unlimited time to spend upon it. When we had tired of the company of the mountains and the sea how should we occupy our thoughts? We could glean no tidings of affairs beyond our immediate neighbourhood, we should know nothing of the rise or fall of states, we should have no correspondence and practically no communication with our fellow human beings scattered over the world, we should be driven in upon ourselves for our interests, our amusements, our objects in life. How many of us could stand so severe a test as this? For no small number of people the science of life consists in being able to provide themselves with an endless round of distractions, that is, as the very word shows, in dragging themselves away from one occupation, one show, one topic to another, because they

cannot dwell on any one long, and at any cost must save themselves from being bored. The morning newspaper begins the day, and fills the empty mind with news of doubtful value: then we crave to know the opinions of our friends or fellow-passengers on what we have read: and discussions arise, and the business of this world seems to become of greater importance the more we talk it over, and we get more and more absorbed in it, and we are floated away upon it as on a tide from our true selves, and from the real business of life, which is to know and serve God in the discharge of the duties of our station. Thus we come to live what is truly an outward life, a life outside our own minds and consciences, existing, thinking, and feeling in the smart phrases of leader-writers, or the gossip of clubs, or the tittle-tattle of drawing-rooms, or wherever we meet our fellows, according to our position in the social scale. Perhaps it is hardly fair to say that people so minded are subject to distraction, for in order to be turned aside from an object we must first of all have been pursuing it, and the very weakness I am attacking lies in the absence of any definite, consistent aim in life at all, of any higher aim at all events, so that we drift now to one point of the compass, now to another, at the mercy of every fresh caprice or whim. In the bracing air of Nazareth such pettinesses could not have lived; it would have blown away these cobwebs of the brain. There would have been always overhead the blue arch of sky,

always around us the everlasting hills, always within sight the dancing waves of the Mediterranean; but the prospect did not vary from day to day, no excursion steamers started from the Jaffa pier, and no parties of tourists were personally conducted by Cook's guides through the valleys of Palestine. What a gulf, it seems almost an impassable gulf, parts now from those scenes, those times! Yet it is good for us to be there in spirit for a while—to watch for a little, standing or on our knees, as suits our mood, in front of the carpenter's shed, Joseph drawing his saw, Jesus planing some piece of wood, Mary engaged in sewing or weaving. What are they thinking of? What are their recreations? How do they manage to lighten the monotony of their life? They are not simple peasants, whose brains have wasted through lack of exercise, who have no ideas above or beyond their daily work and narrow fields. If we could have speech of them, they would surely answer that they needed not our pity and found no monotony in their life. On the contrary, every sun gave them only a fresh occasion of blessing God and a new opportunity of spending themselves in His service.

The modern world is sick at heart and weary in the midst of all its pleasures; it is ever adding to its list of excitements and trying fresh methods of tickling its jaded palate, but probably there never was an age when *Atra Cura*—the *Black Care* of which Horace speaks—sat so close to the successful man, or when the burden of ennui, the dis-

gust with life, pressed so heavily or so widely as to-day. The remedy for this general discontent is not to be sought in the multiplication of amusements, or in sinking deeper into frivolity a society already more than frivolous enough. The truth is that the growth of luxury makes the appetite for enjoyment and the power of enjoyment not greater but less. Some dim understanding of this fact has possibly been at the bottom of such movements as the demand for a return to the "Simple Life," or, in another matter, the cry of "Back to the Land." If the great St. Joseph could teach us not by example only but by word, would he not counsel us to fill our days with some solemn purpose which should give a meaning and unity to our life and a heavenly tincture to its meanest details under the eyes of God? The grating of the carpenter's saw, the clicks of his hammer, did not sound harshly in the realms above, for the Lord's foster-father, and then the Lord Himself wrought for God's glory not with His Hands only but with His Heart. There can be no real monotony in a life lived for God, and its smallest actions are as the dust of gold.

XII

MISTAKEN SEVERITY

I suppose that we all—however good or however bad we are—have our seasons of discontent with ourselves. Some of our friends, no doubt, appear to be always happy; like electric radiators, they are centres of light and heat no matter how low the temperature, and we are grateful to them for it. We take it for granted in them, as a sort of law of their nature, and we inquire no further. We warm our hands at the flame of their good humour and creep back into our own chilliness, not without some feeling of repining and regret. Perhaps if our philosophy were a little deeper, or we made a more careful study of our neighbours or even of our intimate friends, we should be less hasty and more discriminating in our judgments of them. As there are endless shades of expression even in an ordinary countenance if only we took the pains to observe them, so men's moods shift far more rapidly than we commonly suppose. No one is invariably cheerful in this valley of tears; everyone must have his *mauvais quart d'heure*, and he is lucky if it is no longer. But to come back to ourselves, when, for whatever reason, one of our fits of depression is on,

it is a point of practical wisdom to know how best to treat it, and two schools of spiritual medicine or surgery, as I may call them, are ready with their prescriptions. The first believes, as did our ancestors, in cautery and the knife, in blisters and blood-letting, in "cupping" and leeches. It is only in "kill or cure" remedies that they put their faith. The poor patient—in this instance ourselves—is at once diagnosed to be in a dangerous condition, and a thorough overhauling of his medical history is, of course, the first step. The past is raked up, old wounds are torn open, ancient skeletons are disinterred. The greater the agitation, the more vivid the fears, the better the unhappy man is satisfied with his work. His disturbance is, he considers, the proof of his sincerity. Depression is, in his view, the remedy for depression. He piles on one another the most terrifying utterances of Holy Writ, or the bitterest self-reproaches of the great penitents of the Church, and points them all at himself. He finds a strange pleasure in closing against himself every gate of hope, and in making the clouds of doubt so dark that no light can struggle through. When he is supremely and entirely miserable he has at last gained his end. He feels to the tips of his fingers that he is a good-for-nothing, wretched, abandoned creature; hopeless, hapless, helpless; a nuisance to everybody as well as to himself; an excellent riddance if only he could be got rid of, but condemned, unfortunately, to drag out a useless life in a gloom growing more

unendurable, more unintelligible every weary day. Exactly so, the believers in spiritual terrorism will reply; "serve him right, he has brought it all on himself; as he has made his bed so let him lie on it. A wicked sinner must expect such things. What is the worm of conscience for, what is the function of remorse? Let a man take his punishment like a man. Let him rub it in well and not wince. What can't be cured must be endured." Thus far the terrorists, as I may call them; and now let us hear the other side, those kindly physicians of the soul, that is, who offer us very different counsel in our ailments, and who are much more tender in their handling and their methods.

It is needless for me to remind my readers that I am contemplating throughout the cases of sincere men, of weak, frail, erring men, to be sure, not saints but sinners; men, if you will, who have been even great sinners but who now wish to belong to God. In other words, I am not speaking of impenitent sinners, to whom and to whom alone the often-quoted denunciations of Holy Scripture apply. I am trying to describe the line of conduct which good people are apt to follow when they have been naughty boys or naughty girls. That very phrase is itself an inspiration and supplies me with my answer. We are all in God's sight, if we are repentant, only naughty boys or naughty girls. It is precisely because of our childishness, our want of foresight, our want of thought, our waywardness, our lack of self-control, that God is so patient

with our faults. We are weaker and blinder even than we know. We are not always fair judges of the full amount of deliberation, and therefore of malice, in the sins we commit. Our Lord could not tell or insinuate a falsehood and yet He could offer up His prayer to the Eternal Truth: Father forgive them *for they know not what they do*. It is then certain that God may find excuses for us when we can find none for ourselves. We shall never in this life—or indeed in the next—understand altogether the mystery of God's mercy, but one clue to it must be God's infinite knowledge of our all but infinite littleness in comparison with Him. It is our helplessness, our want of sense, our inability to guide ourselves, which seem most of all to appeal to His supreme wisdom, His magnificent strength, His most tender love. He had compassion on the multitude because they were like sheep without a shepherd. A mother is not irritated but touched by the first clumsy attempts of her child to walk; she raises it more carefully and embraces it more lovingly after every fall. We cannot be mistaken if we imitate towards ourselves the methods of Our Heavenly Father, the Author of our nature. He does not threaten us, unless we harden our hearts; He does not storm, He does not knit His brow. He treats with reverence all that He has made; He disposeth all things sweetly, not by terrorism, not by brute force.

Let us, then, when things are not going well with us in the struggles of life, when we have to bear

defeat or disappointment and the sky is overcast, not seek to flog severely a willing though jaded horse. It is the last moment in which to upbraid or even belittle ourselves. We need encouragement; we need restoratives; we need a tonic. Whatever brings warmth or movement, revives or promotes the sluggish circulation, is good and opportune. The colour returning to the cheek, the easier breathing, the stretching of the limbs, are all signs of life. The soul is responding to the motives of confidence and hope. Now is the time to pour in oil and wine, as did the good Samaritan, only we must do it for ourselves: "Soul," we may say, "take courage; faint not; God will not forsake thee; it is no new thing which has happened to thee; many times before thou hast stumbled and fallen, but God has raised thee up, and will do so again; thou art no angel but fashioned of flesh and blood and prone to evil from thy birth; thy Lord is merciful and understanding; He knows that thy frailty rather than thy will consents. His help will be with thee in the future even mightier than in the past." So by degrees the fever-fit dies away, exhausts itself, and when we have recovered our normal calm, and while the lessons of our new experience are still fresh in our minds, we may make our decision between severity and its opposite. Indeed, what good comes of bullying and bluster and contempt, even if directed against our own souls? Brother, sister, do not think that you are helping God's cause by disheartening your-

self; on the contrary, as your spirits rise you mount higher heavenward and you spurn the earth. Hope will give you wings, and you will find easy what you once thought impossible. A victory believed in is a victory assured.

The springs of human action have their source among the mountains, the heights of noble purpose, and it is there we should seek them. To get the best out of a man go to what is best in him. Enlist not what is basest in him but what is finest on your side. Follow, therefore, in regard of yourself, what you would do to another. Hell-fire is a terrible reality and never to be forgotten, but it should not form the staple of our thoughts. It is very useful as a check, as a deterrent, but it alone never made a saint. The *Dies Iræ* rolling through the arches of some great cathedral, fills, subdues, transpierces the soul; but it is a lament, a plea for mercy, a deprecation of wrath. The true battle-cry, leading forward the hosts of the Lord, is the Hymn of Love, the *O Deus ego amo Te* of St. Francis Xavier; to its strains, not loud but deep, heard only by God's ears and our own, we gird on our armour and for His sake quit ourselves like men as long as our heart-beats last. Aim high always, always widen the horizon of your hopes, let each day find you more keen, more energetic, more confident of success. Look not backwards, let the dead bury its dead; forget past failures; set your face steadily to the future, as did your Lord and Master, to the heavenly Jerusalem.

Away with despondency; do not parley with doubts; your own strength is as that of a reed, but you are upheld and carried forward by the power of God. Take yourself by what is glorious in you, not by what is base; by what is eternal, your predilection by God, your destiny, not by what is temporal, your body of clay and its lower passions. Cultivate, reinforce, draw out the diviner elements in you, since you are made after the image and likeness of God; weaken, keep under what only relates you to the brute. The soul is like the human voice, it can be trained throughout all its range; it can be strengthened where it is weak, and softened where it is harsh, and grow indefinitely in fineness, delicacy, and expression. God can if He wishes freeze the soul with terror, shake it with the thunder of His wrath; but He prefers to strike the chords of love, to win us, not to frighten us, into His arms. It is our part to prepare ourselves for His gracious visitations, and to accustom ourselves to recognize and to welcome the faintest breathing of His Spirit.

XIII

THE USES OF CONFESSION

What is called the *consensus fidelium*, that is, the general opinion of Catholics on any matter which the Church's teaching leaves open is rightly considered to be of the highest value. I am afraid that if we take this as a test, as a criterion, we shall be forced to admit that the prospect of the average good man or even of the fervent Catholic escaping altogether the chastisement of Purgatory after death is a poor one. Further, although for many reasons I should not like to say that we are worse than our forefathers—what self-respecting person could possibly allow that?—it cannot be denied that as the world goes on the Church fixes our attention more and more on the condition of the Suffering Souls, is more lavish in her grant of Indulgences applicable to them and, particularly and best of all, makes it easier for her priests to offer the Holy Sacrifice for them. I will not, as I have already said, listen to the suggestion that this generosity in our own days is simply a mark of our own degeneracy, that we are being handled more tenderly because we are such weaklings and such niggards; in truth, I prefer to believe that our hearts are softer than heretofore, and as we are

more humane to our fellow-creatures on earth so are we more willing to help them when they have gone before us beyond the Veil.

Nevertheless, Indulgences are not my present subject, but rather what practical measures we may take to meet the future with which we are threatened according to the common persuasion, even after we have died a pious death. We can of course, if we are so minded, refuse to accept it and brave the consequences, but it seems wiser and is really more manly to look it in the face and try to understand it and see whether the case is so hopeless as it at first appears. Purgatory is a punishment of forgiven sin; God in His Goodness when He ordained the penalty also, as is His wont, provided a remedy for the disease. If we use that as He intended, we shall cut down, or even entirely destroy what might otherwise be fuel for the purging flames. God's remedy for sin, the Sacrament primarily instituted for the remission of sin, is Penance; of Penance therefore I wish to speak, not as a theologian precisely or as a catechist, but as a man to men, and on a point which concerns us all, priests and layfolk alike very nearly. I am sorry to have to add that there exists with regard to it also a *consensus fidelium* as to its uncomfortable nature. It is not popular, no one waxes enthusiastic about it, it is viewed as at best a disagreeable necessity.

At the outset I cannot help feeling that it is unfortunate that the name by which it is commonly

known should be *confession*, which is of course one of the parts of the Sacrament, but decidedly the most unpleasant, and in a sense the least important. What God wants, in a sense, what alone God wants is sorrow for sin (a person who is unable to speak may be validly absolved if he has sorrow for sin in his heart), and therefore it is a pity, it seems to me, that the first idea of the Sacrament of Penance, the first shape under which it presents itself to the mind is that of an inventory of our faults, like a preparation for a sale of furniture, a ransacking and rummaging of our memories that our offences may be duly defined and labelled and then learnt by heart after a lengthy examination of conscience. What wonder that this process, especially in the case of timid and nervous persons, should become a perfect bugbear and distress! It is a melancholy satisfaction to know that this dislike of confession is not of modern date only, for St. John Chrysostom in the fourth century found it necessary to strongly deny that confession deserved to be called the "Executioner of souls" and the Council of Trent placed the expression under a ban. The fact is that the systematization and standardization, which is characteristic of our day, seems to be passing into our piety as well. Everything must be catalogued, everything must have its formula, our misdemeanours must be submitted to a microscope, like a frog's foot; and while we are consulting the table of contents of our examination of conscience, the main object of our search, grief for

sin is in danger of being lost sight of or relegated into a secondary place. No one will consider this an exaggeration who has observed how much of the time usually given to what is called preparation for confession is spent on rooting amidst the tangles of sin, how little on weighing its malice and ingratitude. It is of course the business and duty of moral theologians to classify the different kinds of sin and appraise them with great minuteness, as doctors and surgeons must acquaint themselves with all the parts and functions of the human body. But fortunately laymen need make no such studies and would only muddle themselves in the attempt. Worse still, in some instances, things creep into modern examinations of conscience which imply unsound doctrine, *v.g.*, "Have you been guilty of distractions during a Mass of obligation?" To be guilty of a wilful distraction is of course wrong in any Mass (or for that matter out of any Mass) and not only during a Mass of obligation. But note the suggestion that there is a peculiar enormity in distractions entertained during a Mass of obligation, so that the person guilty of them may fail to discharge his Sunday obligation! The Church requires attendance at Mass in such sort that the faithful should be aware of the chief portions of the celebration; and such attendance is perfectly compatible with any number of distracting thoughts. I am reminded of the well-known story of a Carmelite novice going to St. Teresa with great glee to tell her that she had dis-

covered a new kind of sin hitherto unnoticed in the books. "My dear daughter," the Saint replied, "have we not only too many sins already?"

How then ought we to set about our examination of conscience? Quietly, deliberately, after a short prayer to God for light. There is nothing to be frightened at, nothing to be shocked about. Panic is ridiculous as well as being a bad adviser. There is no hurry, and no one is listening. We are not preparing to stand a cross-examination by a lawyer at the Old Bailey. Probably most of the heads of our accusation are old friends, and present themselves only too readily when called for. Anything very exceptional announces itself like a bad tooth by a perceptible twinge. These newcomers, by the way, are best put in front when we begin our confession to get them over as quickly as possible. If I am honest and sensible, as all my readers must be, and do not waste my time in 'mooning' over tables of sins in my prayer-book which do not concern me, if I do not give myself distractions by being inquisitive as to the duties of masters to servants and servants to masters, being myself neither one nor the other, and if I do not dream idly about the Seven Deadly Sins, or the Nine Ways in which we may share another's guilt, and wonder how our friends avoid them, in other words, if I stick to myself and my own business, and *be quick about it,* I shall make an excellent examination of conscience. Suppose I do unintentionally leave anything out, what harm? It is not likely to have

been anything of consequence; it gave me no wholesome twinge, or I should not have forgotten it. At any rate God knows it and He needs no prompting from me. Nor does He require me to describe my sins with the accuracy of a theologian (unless I am one) and to mark off all the shades of distinction between them, or to spend many minutes in trying to determine whether or how far I have yielded to temptation. Probably the longer you hesitate the more difficult it will be to decide and the less trustworthy your decision will be. God knows what the truth is, that is sufficient. He does not ask you to be infallible, He only asks you to be sincere and *be quick about it*. He does not like to be kept waiting while you are balancing probabilities, and trying to jog your memory and getting hot and uncomfortable; what does He care whether you are right or wrong in your form of accusation as long as you are honest? He is not going to forgive you your sins because you are clever at remembering them or expressing them or marshalling them, but for one reason only, because you are sorry for them. The Council of Trent lays down an admirable rule for confession. Tell your sins as they are in your mind, that is, as they appear to you, according to your own feeling about them. It is by this standard that God judges everyone. All of us have not had an equally good religious education and training: some are duller or endowed with a poorer judgment than others: we belong to different classes or conditions of life, and

easily, without reflection, almost without knowing it, adopt erroneous ideas or valuations in moral matters common among our associates; last but not least, we have not the same amount of spiritual light and are blind to what is perfectly clear to more enlightened souls. In addition to all this there is the further element, which indeed is the most important of all, that is, the intention, the real mind of the person acting. Some people can say scandalous things, or do most unkind things, or set old friends at variance without apparently a suspicion of their own responsibility. The same words on the lips of different speakers according to the animus with which they are uttered may have very different degrees of guilt. Who can sift all these motives, who can disentangle so complicated a web of human interests and temperaments and weaknesses, assigning to each its proper place and weight, except the Supreme Judge Himself? What a lesson it is to all to be gentle in our estimate of others! We may indeed rightly condemn in our own minds the sentiments they utter; but we may hope that it is in ignorance or inconsiderateness, not in malice that they speak.

We have then to tell our own story, not anyone else's story, in our own way. The simpler it is, the shorter it is, the better. Usually it is an old story, we have told it or something very like it in our previous confessions. Don't let us wander from the point more than we can help, let us keep closely to the matter in hand, leaving out justifica-

tions of ourselves or needless explanations and irrelevant circumstances, not of course making out things to have been worse than they really were, not alleging faults against ourselves about which we doubt, only mentioning them to be what is called "on the safe side," and, on the other hand, not sparing ourselves, but "calling a spade a spade," not saying, for instance, "I was greatly tempted against meekness"—to be greatly tempted is not a sin at all—instead of "I lost my temper badly"; and if you want to please God, who so loves straightness and sincerity, you may add, although you are not obliged to do so, "I have a shocking temper and have often to accuse myself of it." The necessary matter of confession is unconfessed mortal sins only, and if our consciences reproach us with none we can always obtain absolution by accusing ourselves of all the sins of our past life. However, it is the practice of good Catholics to mention venial sins also and many confessions consist of nothing else. This being so, it is worth while here to introduce a warning for the devout who are apt to pore over bulky tables of sins and aim at including as many selections as possible in their subsequent confessions. Venial sins need not be brought to confession; a genuine act of sorrow for them in any place or at any time outside the confessional effaces their guilt. To swell our confessions by many venial sins appears to me a great mistake, in fact a privilege only allowed to the saints, and they would not need to avail themselves

of it because the number of their deliberate venial sins would be very small. No sin can be forgiven except in so far as we are sorry for it, and from the nature of the case it is more difficult to excite ourselves to sorrow for slighter than for graver offences. There is no point in mentioning faults almost by rote because we think it respectable to have a big budget. We get distracted by the number and variety of the items, and the result is that none of them receive the attention they deserve. *Qui trop embrasse mal étreint.* A model confession should be clear-cut and frank. It should contain nothing that is mere repetition of what I have read or heard without bringing it home to myself. Every charge I make against myself I should feel to be true not exaggerated, a fact not a mere supposition: how otherwise can I have genuine shame, genuine grief on account of it? It should stand out with all or its main circumstances plain in my memory: how otherwise can I recognize it and take measures to avoid it in the future? Vague accusations, such as "I have been guilty of pride, or vanity, or selfishness, or uncharitableness," without any specification even in my own mind of the individual instances generally serve no good purpose and are unprofitable. Sin, alas! is a great reality, and it is a pity to play with it, to toss it about lightly, as if it were a ball, from hand to hand in our careless examination of conscience; we are dealing with serious matters. If we have transgressed, let us own up to it with-

out reserve or evasion: if we have not, or believe we have not, again let us be truthful, and say nothing for we have nothing to say.

A confession got ready on the lines which I have suggested, sincere, simple, candid and short, is no great tax on our time or memory and will not easily be forgotten afterwards. "A personal interview," by which I here mean an interview with ourselves, a looking at ourselves, as it were, face to face, freely, and without illusions is, if unpleasant, exceedingly wholesome. We may regard ourselves as a machine which we have to drive: the more we know of it the better we shall manage it, the more work we shall get out of it with the least friction and expenditure of force. This knowledge will also be of the greatest advantage to us when something goes wrong, as is inevitable in the wear and tear of life. We shall not be taken by surprise, we shall detect the fault and understand how to remedy it effectually and without delay. It has often seemed a puzzle to me how comparatively little even good people have to show for their many confessions, how they settle down into a sort of fatalism as if they never could be or hope to be markedly better than when they started. They were born, they imagine, with short tempers or with long tongues or with a constitutional dislike to prayer and mortification and a keen appetite for the good things of the world, stiff-necked, selfish and proud—which of us cannot say as much or something like as much of ourselves? Of course

we were so born—at any rate with such evil tendencies! We are not angels! What use would angels have for Confession? We are undoubtedly, taken in the lump, a bad lot! My language is not stronger than the famous expression of St. Augustine. We are, viewed only in ourselves without God's grace, *massa damnata*! There is the comfort of it all! It was precisely such as we that Christ came on earth to save. If we had nothing the matter with us, we should not stand in need of the Heavenly Physician. A little patience, a little good will, a little common sense, and all will be right. The stains on my soul must be got rid of one by one; that is by individual attention, not taking too many at a time, but so that I see clearly and firmly make up my mind about what each confession is intended to do. Some of the spots may require a good deal of rubbing before they entirely disappear. Why not? the result is well worth the trouble. Half, perhaps three-quarters of the ill-health of my soul—of my anxieties of mind and obstacles in doing good—are due to these same spots. We are lucky if we have not found out by our own experience how a slight derangement of some bodily organ may upset all the rest, how to be "liverish," with many people, means to be snappish, and dumpish, and dog-in-the-manger-ish as well. Much more is this true of the maladies of the soul. How much brighter and sweeter and happier would our home-life be if our poor souls were not so soiled! When we prepare for con-

fession our eye ought to be offended at seeing again, seeing still, those faults within us over which we thought we had deeply sorrowed and of which we had determined to make an end. Don't let us say: Well let us have a change, this time we will mention something else. No, no; return to the charge; give yourself no quarter, shame yourself into amendment; do not lose heart: victory is within your grasp. You simply cannot week after week or fortnight after fortnight see yourself as you are, steadily fix your eye on a glaring fault, be heartily sorry for it, and thoroughly ashamed of it, and yet do nothing to amend. Remorse, self-reproach, will after a time become so intolerable that they will goad you into action.

If all this be so, it may fairly be asked, why do so many who are regular in the practice of confession nevertheless, to all human appearances, bear with them gross and disedifying defects to the grave? I am coming now, as I believe, to the kernel of the whole subject. It is because they do not think of God or of the Sacrament of Penance aright. They view it as a police-court, or as a court of law presided over by a severe judge. They enter its precincts unwillingly and are glad to quit them. Human law is notoriously uncertain, it is easy to get entangled in its meshes, they have much the same sort of feeling with regard to the divine law, as though it were full of pitfalls and a man could never be sure that he had avoided them. No one likes to be put on his trial, in one sense a trial for

his life; he feels nervous, he feels guilty, it is a dreadful ordeal and he knows he will acquit himself badly in it. What wonder if he dislikes it and is uncomfortable at the very mention of it! How deplorably false, how unfair to God all these fancies are! If it must be called a court, for of course it is a tribunal instituted under a judicial form, it is a court of relief, a debtors' court, a court of pardons, a court in which the accused can always be acquitted if he will: and the Heavenly Judge, whom the priest represents, is not only not severe, but sits expressly to help and comfort those who appear before Him. In fact, He happens to be, or rather, He necessarily is their Father, and He is giving sentence in the case of His own children whom He loves as the apple of His eye. They have, entirely through their own fault, and in spite of His repeated warnings, got themselves into more or less serious difficulties, and He wants to help them out of them; their souls are in pain, He wishes to cure them: they are wretched, He wishes to make them happy: they are weak, He will give them strength: they are ignorant, He will give them light: they are disheartened, He will encourage them. Punishment, retribution, is the last thing He could think of. Indeed the whole purpose of the Sacrament is to save them from punishment, from vengeance: it is a Divine excuse for letting His poor children off the penalties they have richly deserved. What makes sin sin, is the bad heart from which it proceeds: that is the real

poison of sin. If God could forgive the sin while the poison still remained, while the heart still remained bad, the sinner would have no rest, no peace; therefore God as a condition of forgiveness requires him to spit out the venom, to be sorry for his sin. Can He, ought He to do less? This sorrow, then, is, to speak plainly, the essence, the one essential thing in confession; on it everything depends, it ought to be our chief business, our supreme concern in making ready for confession. Anything which distracts us from it, or renders it more difficult, is to be avoided as a snare. The easier I can make confession for myself, the less formidable, the more natural, the more matter of fact—dealing with facts only, honestly and shortly—the better: I shall not find it hard to be sorry for my sins, big or little, if I always remember that it is my Father whom I have offended, who has never done me any harm, who is always befriending me and protecting me and loving me, who grieves with me in all my sorrows and enhances all my joys, and so orders my life although I know not how, that all things should work together for my good.

XIV

THE DIVINE CHILD A MODEL OF TRUST

By trust we here understand placing confidence in, committing ourselves to, leaving ourselves at the disposal of and, so far forth, at the mercy of another. It may be said that a child cannot do otherwise, it cannot shift for itself, it must lean upon others whether it wish it or not. And, of course, this is true if we speak of any ordinary child. But we shall miss the whole lesson of our Lord's early days if we ever forget that His life had been, to use a human phrase, thought out by Himself in every detail beforehand, and that it followed exactly in every turning the course He had Himself traced for it from the first. He did not accept the poor hospitality of the midnight cave because He could not help Himself, nor lie uncomplaining in His mother's arms during the escape into Egypt because complaints were of no avail. He was trusting her and His foster-father every step of the way, watching them face and meet, like successive waves, each new danger as it arose, and overcome them, not by angelic aid, but by human courage and care. It is surely plain from the Gospel narrative that St. Joseph and Our

Lady were not ordinarily over-ruled by a special guidance from God which they blindly obeyed, and which made it needless for them to use their intelligence, to forecast risks, to balance probabilities, as we must in daily life. When shall we take to heart the truth which spreads so widely into the affairs of our soul if only we could see it—that God desires from men and women a human service, by human means, upon our human earth? The Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity listen with joy to the threefold Holy, Holy, Holy, chanted by the Angels in Heaven, but They also bend Their Ear to catch the prayer lisped by the little child at his mother's knee, and They would not exchange the one for the other. We should not glorify God by rising, if it were possible for us to do so, above our human nature into some higher one, leaving our own behind—this would mean confusion, a disturbance of the order which God Himself has settled. The perfection of every creature lies in growing to its full stature, in using to its utmost stretch and compass all its powers, but always within the limits which its nature prescribes. How many an anxious night did Joseph pass fleeing before Herod's soldiers, the sole earthly protector of Christ's mother and her Child! He was led by no cloud during the day, no pillar of fire at night. He must turn over in his mind all the hazards of the journey and bethink himself how best they were to be encountered or shunned. The Babe sleeping peacefully on Mary's breast knew every moment

through what dangers He was being borne, yet He made no sign; He left Joseph to discharge his trust by the light of his natural faculties and the firmness of his constant heart. Every throb of Joseph's heart was counted by Jesus, He felt His mother's heart beneath His tiny frame; He knew well why they quickened from time to time—He was the cause of alarm, but He was not displeased. How could He be angry at their solicitude? Their human fears on His account, their perplexities, their doubts, were all fresh fuel to His love. Mary would not have been a woman, nor Joseph a man, if they had not been subject to these feelings, and it was by means of them that they proved their faithfulness to their Lord.

Nevertheless, how common a mistake it is to see in life's vicissitudes the tokens, as we think, of God's indifference to our lot. He is the Ruler of the Universe; not a leaf rustles, not an insect dies, unless by His permission, even, in a true sense, by His act. He has each one of us in His closest keeping, He holds us in the hollow of His Hand. Why then, we ask ourselves, are we assailed by so many foes? Why are we misunderstood, and wronged, and evil spoken of? Why so many disappointments, and sudden trials, and reverses when the goal seemed at last in sight, only a few steps away? Worst of all, perhaps, when shall we be free of that perpetual heart-ache, that wearing suspense because we cannot read the future, and at any moment our dear ones, or our worldly position

and goods, may sink in the dust and leave us desolate? When such thoughts overshadow us, let us gain comfort and strength from the memory of how God used Mary and Joseph long ago. They saw no farther ahead than we do, because human beings can have no certain grasp except of the present, and must guide themselves by probabilities and take risks and hope for the best. It is the law of human existence, and the highest as well as the lowest must obey it. Is there then no sure stay in the storms of life, no anchor that will not drag in the stress of wind and wave? None, certainly, if we turn our eyes on ourselves; our help can only be from the Lord. We must learn to look to Him, to put our trust in Him.

But how are we to learn to put our trust in Him, especially in a day of which wholesale distrust is almost a characteristic? Not only in the financial and in the commercial world is honesty—and therefore the groundwork of trust—said to be on the wane, but in every class, in every relation of life, confidence in one another is sapped, and everyone is suspicious of his neighbour. The simplicity of former times is dead, we are told; the world grows more crafty as it grows older; its wiles are not fewer, but they are better hidden; new schemes, new theories, new inventions are only names for fresh forms of deceit: the only safety for a plain man or woman is, briefly, to take no one's word. However true or false this account of our own days may be, one thing seems to me

to be quite beyond doubt, viz., that this kind of temper will do us much harm, if we carry it into our dealings with God. And yet some of us fail, I fancy, at all to realize how close, almost how necessary the connection is between our behaviour to our fellow-creatures and our behaviour to the Creator; necessary, I should say, not only because God so often warns us that He regards what is done to our neighbour as if it were done to Himself, but further necessary from the very nature of the case. Other things being equal, a man who is open-handed with his friends is likely to be generous to God, a man gentle in his judgment of his fellow-creatures will not think harshly of God, a man of noble mind will be attracted by the character of Jesus Christ, and so on, in countless instances. There are unfortunately many exceptions to this rule, but they can, I think, generally be explained by the lack of opportunity in the persons concerned to know or to appreciate the claims of the Creator. We can therefore in this way prepare ourselves by our intercourse with human beings for our more important relations with our Maker. It very largely depends on us whether we are good-tempered in social life, whether we are fond of fault-finding, whether our tone is usually bitter or flippant or captious. If we are so hard to please on earth, is it strange that we are always grumbling about the arrangements of Providence as well? It is only too easy, too natural to take God to task for all our disappointments, as we are in the habit

of blaming in daily life the unkindness or stupidity of our fellow-creatures. Is there not a type of man whom nothing seems to please, nothing to satisfy? May he not sometimes vent his ill-humour on Heaven itself and work himself into a fury with circumstances beyond his control, in other words, with the Divine Will which he mistakes for chance or unreason?

It would be no bad training in trusting God if we would begin by trusting our neighbour, by seeing more good in him and taking more pains to understand him and trying to work more cordially and harmoniously with him in carrying on the business of life. We love to think that we can stand alone, and are beholden to no one and do not need to lean on others, so strong and clever and self-supporting we are; and at last we may come to fancy that we can dispense with the aid of God Himself. And thus we go to Him by prayer and the Sacraments as little as possible, and, as we say, we make and live our own life, and trust chiefly our own right arm to hew our way through whatever difficulties oppose us. How hard it is for the Divine Goodness to make anything worthy or noble out of a worldly temper such as I have described, to open the eyes of a man who does not know that he is blind and does not want to see! He has no high hopes, no spiritual ambitions, he is self-satisfied. He has shut himself up in himself, in the prison of his own narrow material views. He will not let in God's light or air, or voice; he has no

use for them. And yet God can do nothing with us, and certainly nothing great for us, unless we come out of ourselves and trust Him. He holds out to us His Hand, and we must grasp It and allow Him to lead us forward. We must make no conditions with Him, as, for instance, that He must tell us whither He conducts us, and we must not seek to regulate the pace, and complain that He goes too fast and that we must be granted time to recover our breath and to admire the scenery. It must needs be strange at first sight, and unfamiliar to us, because we are nearer to God, and further away from our worldly selves than we have ever been before; it is almost painful to breathe at so great a height, and even a little movement is fatiguing. We wish we were back on the lowlands again, and among our old friends of lukewarmness and creature comforts. But courage! Be of good heart! All beginnings inspire fear. It is not that God desires to frighten us, but it cannot be otherwise. All trust means a casting of oneself into God's arms, and there must be a natural shrinking on our part from the flight. On the other hand, to what unhappiness we condemn ourselves by always hesitating on the brink! To say the truth, the measure of our trust in God, of our surrender of ourselves to His good pleasure, is the measure of our advance in holiness. If we are sluggards in God's service, and doing little for Him while the sands of life are running out, the explanation is not that we are weak, or have an unsatisfactory past, or

are at grips with harassing temptations in the present; for all these things God's ready help is more than sufficient, if we secure it, and steadfast confidence in Him will secure it infallibly. Otherwise our soul starves in the midst of plenty, and dies of thirst hard by the fountains of living water.

XV

A CONFIDENT OUTLOOK

The *Times* newspaper is in the habit of publishing every New Year a brief account of the preceding twelvemonth: and a difficult matter it must be in these stirring days to compress so much within so narrow limits. Another page has also been added by the Recording Angel to the history of our own lives, which we shall read sooner or later, as the case may be. *That* is a summary, or rather a most exact report of our doings, to which our thoughts do not always turn with pleasure. But I do not wish to dwell upon a somewhat disquieting topic at the beginning of the year. It seems to me that we all of us need much more to take on board a cargo of hopes than of fears when we are putting off for our voyage over the sea of the year which is now beginning.

I suppose that the best preparation for any stress or strain which we may have to undergo is a cool head, and whatever clouds our judgment is a hindrance. We ought to try to get as clear an idea as possible of the work in front of us and how it is to be tackled. Uncertainty, mistiness regarding it is, if not fatal, at any rate disabling so far

forth. We grope and fumble, instead of seizing our object at once and firmly. Now a cool head is just as much needed or perhaps more needed in spiritual than in mundane matters, and stresses and strains are no less common in the first than in the second. Again, despondency among good people on the subject of their own goodness is almost a malady of our time, and of course low spirits are utterly prohibitive of the courage essential to success. For several reasons therefore it behoves us to learn how best to brace the nerves of our soul, and to keep them taut for the future. There is nothing gained by glossing things over in our soul's troubles, any more than it is wise to hide the true nature of our ailments from a physician, who by the way will charge us exactly the same whether we tell him much or little. Accordingly I will put the case of the imagined (not the imaginary) invalid in somewhat lurid colours. He begins by saying, "Dispirited, of course I am dispirited! How can any sane person be otherwise if he thinks about his soul at all? Prayer, the presence (I had almost said the existence) of God, sorrow for sin —it all seems to me, I am speaking of what is called the supernatural life, like a kind of dream. Take prayer, for instance, *my* prayer, I cannot speak for others, but I strongly suspect they would say the same—what is it? I either think of nothing or examine the architectural beauties, if there are any, of the church, or most frequently rehearse the latest gossip or worse my ears have listened to, or am glad

that I have a little quiet time and opportunity of brooding over my wrongs and planning reprisals. How can a fellow help being downhearted about a prayer like that? 'Serve you right!' is the reply I get when I complain or go for sympathy to some 'spiritual' person or book. 'What else can you expect? if you keep your mind filled with worldly thoughts all day, of course they will not leave you in church. Why don't you practise recollection more?' After all, a man who lives in the world and among worldly people must have plenty of worldly thoughts in his head whether his memory is good or bad. Then, as to the presence of God: 'Put yourself in the presence of God,' meditation books tell you. How am I to bring before me, still more how am I to present myself before the Invisible God? I do not indeed doubt of His existence, I would lay down my life for my Faith, but I am dispirited, not because I disbelieve, but because while believing with my whole heart I seem to find so little support from what I hold. I open my hand and I close my fingers and I seem to grasp nothing within them, only air. This is what I wish to express by calling the supernatural as to me a kind of dream. Next, as to sorrow for sin. I do believe that God is good, and that no name is too bad for me since I have offended Him, but how can I be sure that my sorrow is genuine? If I were sincerely sorry, should I fall back so often into my former sins? Why also do Catholic moralists insist so much on the purpose of amendment as if

it were likely to be absent in many cases? If I assure a fellow-man that I am sorry for having injured or insulted him, I do not think it necessary to add that it is my present intention to do so no more, in fact I should be greatly astonished if he required such a promise from me. To express my regret for my conduct implies my resolve not to repeat it. Is God less willing to forgive or more suspicious than His creatures? It is plain that true repentance must involve a resolution to do better, but when I am questioned explicitly about it, I begin to distrust myself, and it is idle to deny that I am despondent about the future."

So far the grievances of the melancholic in the early year. We can see that they are exaggerated and perhaps to some extent temperamental as well, but we are lucky people if they do not arouse a twinge or two in our own consciences also, very much as damp weather will set a decayed tooth aching in our head, or remind us unpleasantly of an old wound. What can be said in answer? I am not sure that some persons would not lightly brush the whole subject aside, call it a much ado about nothing and say that no good could come from seeking to understand what must always be mysterious, God and religion. *Mysterious*, that is, containing mysteries, and therefore not completely intelligible by us, certainly; *mysterious*, that is, vague, shadowy, unreal, no. I believe that religion is intended to be a solid prop of our life and a means of constant communication, especially

in times of darkness and difficulty between our Master and ourselves: that what is fanciful and to be avoided is not the truth about His Nature and His Presence, but false notions, only too prevalent, concerning both. Let me bring out as briefly and clearly as I can what I mean. Even if I fail, I shall reckon it an advantage to have directed my reader's attention to what I am led to consider an unfamiliar topic.

I consider then that the mysteriousness of religion, by which I understand the difficulty of getting hold of it, of becoming aware of its practical bearing on life, is often greatly exaggerated. It has no colour, to be sure, nor dimensions, nor weight, but neither has the soul. I cannot draw a picture of my soul. But I do not disbelieve in it for that reason. I know it by its effects, although I have not the faintest idea what it looks like in itself, indeed I am quite sure that it has no looks, in the ordinary sense of the word, no appearance at all. Yet it is with me all day long, it is *me*: and the longer I live the greater puzzle it is to me, but the more I am convinced of its reality. What wonder therefore if I do not fully apprehend the existence and the presence of God? I know Him as I know my own soul, by what He works in me, is always working in me. If I behave well, I feel supported, commended even while the effort costs me pain: if I act badly I am ashamed, although there may be no one by, and I cannot shake off the gloom or the remorse, supposing the matter

to be one of importance, strive as I may. This sense of right and wrong, capable in itself of cheering or embittering all the steps of my earthly pilgrimage—this approval or disapproval of conscience, by whatever term we choose to describe it, honour, uprightness, high principle—what is it except the voice of God, showing Him to be in the centre of my soul, always watching, helping, directing me so far as I permit Him to do so? I cannot see the wind although it may be high and force me back or carry me forward; I breathe the air, if it be still, unconsciously: so, whether I notice the impulses of grace, which is only God acting on my mind and heart, or am immersed in my daily work with no thought beyond, in God I live and move and have my being.

Again, if I will only take the trouble I can at any moment open up communication with Him who holds the world and much more myself in the hollow of His Hand, and who, incredible though it may seem, does not resent but dearly loves my intrusion upon His privacy. A word, a thought, a flutter of the heart is enough and He is listening to me, not to rebuke, to reject, but to welcome, to console. It will be said that it is impossible or tiresome to fix our thoughts upon Him—it often is so, but He does not ask so much. We may not be able to use any form of prayer, it is not necessary to do so, we can speak to Him with the voice of the heart. "Ah! poetry, mysticism!" you will exclaim. Not at all. Sober sense, human nature acting in

a human way. A lonely heart offering its loneliness to God, a stricken soul simply exhibiting its wounds, weakness, craving for strength, misery imploring relief—this is to pray indeed. Our need is our sufficient argument, God's goodness our unfailing hope. Is anything which I have recommended actually outside our reach? Treatises on prayer, long experience of what is called the spiritual life, skilful directors—all valuable helps in their place and season, are not indispensable if we would make our religion a reality. Good will, and good instruction, teaching us to love God, not to tremble before Him, are all that is required. There is no better disposition in which to enter upon the New Year than this. This will drive away despondency and give us courage. We cannot fail, because our strength is not from ourselves.

XVI

MORE HASTE, WORSE SPEED

It is told of the great French surgeon Nelaton, who succeeded in extracting from the body of Garibaldi a bullet which a great English surgeon had denied was there, that he was in the habit of saying to his assistants during operations, "Don't let us hurry, gentlemen, for we have no time to lose." This caution is useful beyond the realm of surgery, and tends to become more necessary, as it seems to me, the longer the world lasts. The pace of our movement is always increasing, our very thoughts must bestir themselves to deal with the objects presented to them by new methods of communication from the ends of the earth, it is hard to keep our heads and even our seats in the perpetual merry-go-round of life. Hustle, bustle; everyone eager, everyone with his own interests to serve, and all mixed up inextricably in a confusion which every moment makes thicker and more bewildering. How can we avoid hurrying when everyone is hurrying all about us, how can we remain stationary in the full force of the current? And yet unless we hold ourselves in check, we shall be able to do little in the affairs either of this world

or of the next. If we let ourselves be swept away and lose our clear sight or firm grasp of things, we shall make mistakes and shall be weak and inconsistent. We shall not be able to bring our whole power to bear on the task before us and we shall fail because our strength has been scattered. I have already said that undue haste, leading as it does to distraction of mind, is an enemy to good work in temporal business; much more is it harmful in the cultivation of the soul, and to this I now proceed with some attempt at order, for the sake of greater clearness.

In the first place then how are we children of the twentieth century likely to suffer from hurry in the instance of our prayer? I am not going to speak of our greater liability to distractions, if we set ourselves side by side with our grandfathers or grandmothers, or perhaps even with our own parents, for that point is clear enough; the difference in bulk between our daily correspondence, our telephone-calls, and theirs would be conclusive in itself. It is plain that we are at a great disadvantage in such a comparison. Tennyson speaks of the "spacious times of great Elizabeth." I will not examine his words or the character of the person whom he introduces too curiously, but certainly those times were for most people, at any rate, more roomy, less crowded with occupations, with news, with excitements than our own. Life was lived by most people at a lower pressure, there was less to read, more leisure to think than now. We cannot help,

and we are not responsible for, these differences: and I am far from saying that God cannot be served under our own conditions as well as He might have been under the old. Only it is right that we should recognize our situation and accommodate ourselves to it. I suppose what Nelaton meant by his warning was that his confrères should not let themselves be flustered by the importance of the work on which they were engaged and the gravity of the issues involved—nothing less, perhaps, than life or death. They needed all the judgment and knowledge and coolness they could command. What he wanted to create or to ensure in them for the happy result of their labours was a temper or frame of mind enabling them to utilize to the utmost on a critical occasion all the skill of which they were masters. Is there no application of the same principle for us when we give ourselves to prayer? It will be our wisdom, then, to begin our devotions in as tranquil a disposition as we can manage, not in haste, not in over-eagerness, not with the determination to make the most of the few minutes we can spare for them, by crowding, that is, into a narrow space as many petitions and as many pious exercises as possible. Prayer is a business not of time but of eternity; we put ourselves in communication during it with the Eternal God. "Do not let us be in a hurry, gentlemen, for we have no time to lose." It is not minutes which count, but our attitude of mind, of heart. We cannot hurry God, and we ought not to be in

trepidation ourselves. In calmness, in peace, "in the incorruptibility of a quiet and a meek spirit" (I Pet. iii. 4) we ought to approach Him. The fever and the fret of earth, its cares, its ambitions its apprehensions, are as noises which we must get out of our ears before we can listen to, before we can catch, the accents of the voice of God. It is quite true that we cannot still this hubbub at our will; as we pass out of the glare and tumult of the street into the twilight and silence of the Church, we cannot, alas! shut the doors as well on the thoughts of the world out of which we have stepped. Who is there who has not at some time sighed for such a consummation? Upholsterers are ingenious in devising hangings to muffle sound or exclude the draughts at the entrance of our churches. Who will invent a curtain which will cut us off instantaneously and as long as we remain behind it from mundane preoccupations? It is foolish, we know, to expect it, to desire it. But we can train ourselves to be patient under these distractions, even if we cannot keep them away. To be put on one's guard against excitement does not take away the occasions of tremors, but only reminds us of our duty to resist them when they come. We cannot start our prayers to-day with the undisturbed, not to say, perhaps, somewhat blank or stagnant minds of our ancestors centuries ago—after all, the "spacious times" may have been in country parts a little sleepy if the truth were spoken—but we need not make too much of

what is inevitable and therefore not blameworthy, accidental and therefore of no real importance. Let the cries of worldly interests and topics gradually die away, or go on screaming if they will not be hushed; they can do us no harm. At worst they are only echoes of distant sounds; they are outside us and they cannot penetrate the sanctuary of our rest. We pray in the heart, and even if they fill and disorder our imaginations and our minds, they cannot enter there, where God dwells and hears our desires without the help of words. We have no need, then, to strive against wandering thoughts if our hearts be right towards God. As long as our purpose holds—as of course it does hold, why else do we continue in church or in prayer?—we are truly worshipping God by remaining in His Presence in loyalty to Him, although our fancies, which we cannot control, may be thousands of miles away. Surely this is good sense. Our Heavenly Father never demands of us the impossible. He who made our minds has given them their laws. Our thoughts cannot be shifted backwards and forwards like the hands of a watch. They are sensitive to a hundred impulses, sometimes hidden from us, frequently beyond our command, and to seek to constrain them is often futile and not seldom dangerous.

In the Sermon on the Mount we are told "enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret: and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee." Our heart is the cham-

ber wherein God hears our secret prayers, prayers sometimes even secret from ourselves, because God can read our wishes before they come fully to the birth. How little we really know of what is going on in this inner chamber! Even while our heads are thronged and dizzy with importunate thoughts God is cleansing and strengthening and transforming our hearts; we speak, perhaps, of our prayer as one long distraction and almost as a new offence against God; we rise wearily from our knees under a sense of depression to turn, as we consider, empty-handed away, whereas we have been fed without knowing it with invisible manna and our spirit has been renewed as that of the eagle by contact with the Presence of God. We make, I fear me, plenty of mistakes in our spiritual life, but I doubt if, in the case of earnest persons, any is more harmful than the belief that God is displeased with us when He is not, or is indifferent to our efforts when He values them extremely. The incursion of idle thoughts when we want to be serious is teasing enough of itself, but what is far harder to bear is the fear that on account of these we have wasted our prayer-time or worse. After repeated attempts, equally unsatisfactory, as it appears to us, we either give up the enterprise as hopeless and adopt the view that a taste for prayer, like an ear for music, is a gift of value, not granted to all, or we plod gloomily on to the bitter end. Assuredly it is not easy to travel steadily forwards along the narrow way if we are never gladdened by a gleam of sun-

shine and high banks are always interposed between us and the scenery around. The question is, does God intend, does He wish this condition of things, or is it mainly of our own making? Distractions—straying, ridiculous, incoherent thoughts, sometimes settling down into well-worn tracks, sometimes as inconstant as the shifting winds—are, for most of us, a constant quantity, always to be reckoned with, always in the neighbourhood, if not always actually present.

In these days they have risen into an importance and a power greater than ever before. I do not exactly like to add that they have come to stay; at any rate there is no immediate prospect of their disappearance. This is an era of distractions born of the whirl of modern life. Must we, then, say that prayer is now out of date, that it has been killed by the clatter and catcalls of modern civilization, that it is only in the holy seclusion of Carmel or of Parkminster that we can invoke God? "Don't let us hurry, gentlemen, for we have no time to lose." If we do not hurry, or let ourselves be hurried by harassing imaginations when we put ourselves in prayer, that is, if we do not heed them any more than barking dogs or whistles for taxis, we shall live them down. The mere knowledge that my fate, so to put it, is in my own hand, steadies and composes my mind. Once I am satisfied that my multitudinous distractions, which I do not desire although I cannot chase them away, do not really separate me from God, I cease to dread them

and they torment me no longer. I regain my self-possession, I know that my heart is fixed on God, and that God requires no more of me. By degrees my mind itself follows the lead of my heart—let the philosophers say what they will!—and I discover that true prayer, helpful and comforting intercourse with my Heavenly Father, is quite possible, ay, not only at church or every morning and night, but in the crowded street or wherever or whenever life's stress is most keenly felt.

Make trial, devout reader, for yourself; try once, try twice, try till you succeed, and you will have found on earth the Key of Paradise.

XVII

THE PATH TO HEAVEN

A Prayer-book which once was popular in England, and indeed may be so still, bears the title which stands at the head of this article, and I venture to borrow it for my own purposes. It conceives of the spiritual life as a journey along a well-defined track, leading the wayfarer, if he follow it rightly, to his proper destination at the end. He may have, he probably will have, many adventures on the road: it will wind, now it will go down into a valley, now it will climb a hill. The character of the country will also vary, smiling at one time, at another bleak, rich or barren, picturesque or dull. He must always be pressing onward, that is the one thing necessary, and if he can manage that, in spite of halts and hindrances and fatigue, sooner or later he will inevitably win through. Of course, no two men can have exactly the same life story, our souls are much more unlike than our faces: and even if we were all placed in the same circumstances, the same outward influences act differently on different dispositions at different times. Nevertheless it is possible to lay down, as on a chart, certain great features of the territory through which we pass on our way to heaven, and it will not be without interest to consider them.

When we first set out, then, heavenwards, or, to drop metaphor, when we first take up in earnest the work of our salvation, we have unfortunately to deal with a state of things brought about by our own previous negligence or misconduct, and in order to start fair, as it were, we have to try to undo the mischief of our own making. The ground on which we tread is not hard to the foot, but slippery and swampy, we sink in it, and are bemired and stick fast; over it hang mists and fog, through which twinkle dimly will-o'-the-wisps, that is, false lights of our imagination, perhaps helped by diabolic suggestion as well. We are in the region of darkness and storm. The time calls for wary walking, for we must pick our steps, and very few rays of light can struggle through the heavy air; we must press our hats tightly down on our brows, and fare straight on through the driving rain and gathering gloom until relief comes, how or whence we hardly know. In other words, the atmosphere of our souls has become clouded by long indulgence in worldliness and sin; we grope in a kind of twilight in which objects are seen only in outline and distorted and all out of true proportion: we have many falls, and rise with difficulty, and miss our way, and with great exertion cover little ground in a long time. The swamps must be dried up, if the steaming mists are to cease to rise: trees must be cut down and the dense undergrowth cleared, if the light of heaven is to find entrance to brighten and to warm. We must open by true

repentance our minds and our hearts to the sun of grace. And so we quit the lower levels, the fens and marshes, as we may call them, in which so many souls linger for so long, a noisome, dismal, cheerless tract, too cold for rapid movement, too dark to see clearly, where no virtues can grow strong and tall, but hard thoughts of God and of our fellow-creatures, and low and narrow views, and all manner of doubts, and distrusts, and suspicions breed. We do not emerge at once into perfect day; usually the mists scatter only by degrees, and we advance slowly, almost fearfully, as they dissolve, a little blinded by the growing light, but gathering courage as we go on, until lo! there seems to come forward into the brightness, to come forward to meet us half way, One, Himself the Source of all Brightness, a Divine Figure, wonderfully near, and yet inexpressibly far, since in this mortal life He can only be seen as in a glass, darkly, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. In the language of ascetical writers, we have passed from the Purgative to the Illuminative Way.

Now that the interior senses of the soul have been sufficiently cleansed and purified to receive the impressions of the Divine Wisdom, we can become learners in Christ's School, "taught of God," and may make the study of Him under this Divine Light the main business of our lives. Many, indeed most probably, far the largest number even of fervent Christians and even of religious men and women never get beyond this stage; but with this

we need not now concern ourselves. Let us give our best attention to our Lord's words about Himself, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life," as bringing home to us in some way how He discharges His work of "illuminating," "enlightening" our souls. In a general sense He is the Way, that is, He shews the way in which we all must walk. In His Sacred Life we see examples of the highest virtue, which we may and ought to take for imitation according to our special circumstances. So much, however, is true almost of a pagan who should carefully study the life of Him whom he does not accept as his God. It is not merely the outward contemplation of His Life which is to draw us nearer to Jesus Christ, although, of course, we do so contemplate it in our prayers and meditations. What we stand most in need of, what we should yearn for with all our hearts, is that Christ Himself should strike our souls with His Light, the brightness of His example in so far as He intends it to be copied in the details of our daily lives. The task of a teacher is not exhausted when he has laid down the general principles of his subject before his class. He must teach his pupils how to handle, how to apply in practice what he has broadly sketched. How true we must all feel this to be in the countless actions of which our duties are composed!

We are all at one as to the definition of humility, charity, meekness, and the rest; we can even offer advice on such topics to our intimate friends. But

how far we are to seek when the occasions of practising them occur in actual life! In what particular circumstances, by what special thoughts or words or deeds am I, not anyone else, but I myself, considering my past history and my present endowments, to fashion in myself that likeness to my Saviour which God the Father always designed, for which He created me? To know this is to be enlightened indeed, and in and through this enlightenment, as through a portal, we are admitted into the Truth of God, not only, that is, to understand that God alone is True, incapable of deceit, hating all crookedness, but also to share in some degree that truthfulness ourselves, becoming lovers of all sincerity, and banishing imposture from our actions, words, and thoughts. "If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome," the Master has said: the Divine light which He pours into the purified soul makes it look out on the world simply, straightly, honestly, without pretence or guile. Thus every day the image of the Lord stands out more clearly, and His Way, the special individual service He requires of me, the same and yet different in a hundred points from what He requires of others, shines more brightly, and it seems to broaden, and to branch out into wider and wider usefulness the further I go, until the days of my pilgrimage are over, and in His mercy He who has taught me His Truth, and shewn me His Way, becomes my Life, as far as the Infinite can communicate Itself to the finite, for all Eternity.

XVIII

THE MARY-MONTH

It is not easy, and it is not to be wished if it were easy, to have new thoughts about the Blessed Mother of God, because we might purchase novelty at the expense of truth. But it is very pleasant, nevertheless, to go back to the old thoughts and take them out like beautiful garments from the wardrobe of the mind, and unfold them and hold them up to the light, and admire their richness and their shape. It is to be feared, perhaps, that we have allowed some of them to lie too long unused, and they may, therefore, have lost, not their intrinsic grace, but their power for good on our lives. It is surely by no mere accident, but by a Divine fitness, that Mary's month falls in the Spring quarter of the year, the season of youth and tender promise and of hope, when there is brightness and song in the air, and happy human hearts seem to be invited to rejoice along with re-awakened Nature in her flocks and flowers. God's goodness and care for His creatures seem almost to make themselves felt in a sensible way, if only we were not afraid of Him, and did not think it irreverent or dangerous to remind ourselves of His Presence who dwells

in the very centre of our souls. The light Spring airs fan our cheeks as softly as He touches our hearts; His sun is not yet in its strength; it warms without scorching the bosom of the earth, and draws forth the blades of grass and early blooms; so He cherishes our tender virtues till they sprout, and their fragrance is sweeter to Him than for us the primroses of the meadow. These vernal days, then, are the proper setting, as it were, in which to contemplate Mary, herself the Lily of the valleys. She is the most beautiful of all God's human works, except, of course, the Manhood of her Son, and the many flowers once named after her in our popular speech shew how the Catholic instinct saw her and loved to recall her in earth's fairest gifts. That personal attachment to her and enthusiasm for her honour has now, alas! long grown cold in the country which was her dower. All the more reason why we, who keep the old Faith amidst desecrated shrines, should try to make amends for what heresy has reft away. And yet it is not in a sense the material lapses, the seizure of our cathedrals and churches and of their revenues, and the destruction of religious houses, which we have most to deplore and to make good if it were in our power to do so, but rather the spiritual damage wrought by Protestantism in the national mind. Indeed, the constant contact with the spirit of Protestantism has evil effects upon ourselves which we cannot ignore. I have said something about the influence of Spring on our material lives, how it brings into them a

light and freshness and buoyancy, about which we cannot doubt, although we may not be clever at putting it exactly into words; we may be peevish and vote it all poetry or rhetoric, but all the time we feel its essential truth. So also we may make little, if we like, of what is called a Protestant atmosphere or a Catholic atmosphere, but they are great realities, and can work great harm or great good nevertheless. Probably, as might indeed be expected, it is they over whom they have the greatest sway who are aware of it least. Somehow in a Catholic country—the more truly Catholic the better—all the Church's doctrine about Our Blessed Lady falls naturally into place, it raises no difficulties, it produces no jars; we breathe it in freely and eagerly as we do the morning air; we rest upon it, we feed upon it, it gives us peace. We know her to be human, she must be so, we could have no part in her if she were not so. We are so much at home with her because she is one of our own people, entirely one of ourselves, and yet we feel that though she trod the ways of earth like ourselves, no soil, no blemish, ever came near her, still less ever fastened upon her. The radiant vision of her —although she was no mere vision, but made of flesh and blood as we are—is so familiar to the Catholic mind in a Catholic land that it seems to her children never to fade, but is always at hand to guide, to protect, to bless them. That is why such devotions as the Rosary are so popular amongst them, because it deals with a person who

is not indeed Divine, but whom they believe to have almost boundless power with God, whom they address with the utmost sincerity as Mother, and in whose presence, as they pray to her, they feel absolutely no fear or constraint. This simple, childlike spirit is contagious in its nature. Children learn it from their mothers, and when they are grown up they in their turn pass it on to their fellows; it grows greater instead of less, and soon becomes the common property of all. Thus in the end human respect and fashion are enlisted on God's side instead of against Him. On the other hand, what happens where we Catholics are in a considerable minority, as in England? Not only are we subject to the pressure of a hostile public opinion, of which we are conscious even when it does not break out in deeds or words, but the religious ideals, if they deserve the name, and the very catchwords of those with whom we live are apt to tell somewhat upon us in practice, although we do not in theory accept them as our own. That self-reliance which is so praised among our Protestant neighbours, and is so useful and almost necessary in business of every kind, gets only too easily transferred into the sphere of religion. A man must think for himself, and must not be priest-ridden, forsooth. He must deal directly with his Maker, and have no go-betweens, no sacraments or sacrifice, no mediation of saints. We Catholics know, of course, that these ideas are wrong, or are misunderstandings, or are carried too far. But they may im-

press us, even while we laugh at them and put them from us. They prepare us to believe that there may be such a thing as an excess of devotion to the Blessed Virgin, that it is better suited to women and children than to men, or at any rate to foreign temperaments rather than to our own. We fancy we are growing more strong-minded and logical in our religious practices, when we are only stiffening and hardening in our attitude to God. We aim at doing without Him and, of course, without His Mother, as much as possible, whereas our progress ought to be tested by our more frequent reference to Him of the smallest details of the day. God, we think, ought not to be troubled by us, nor His Mother, in matters which we can very well settle for ourselves!

We may at last quite unwittingly come to the point of considering that a man of sense may safely leave a good deal of piety to timorous or highly-wrought persons and be none the worse or less happy for the loss. To be sure, the irreligious hold such views and such language all the world over, but the mischief of it is greatly strengthened when it has a basis, as it were, in the national sentiment and in the national religion.

It has been remarked that the old Roman religion was at bottom an affair of barter, a sort of business arrangement between the gods and their clients. The proper sacrifices were to be offered at the stated times, the incense duly burned before the images of the Lares and Penates, the deities of

the hearth; or, again, processions conducted through the fields in honour of the gods who were supposed to make the seasons fruitful. And if their worshippers correctly performed their part, the Heavenly Powers kept faith on their side also, gave the desired prosperity, and warded off pestilence and drought. There was no question of real reverence or love in the business, it *was* business, and therefore suited well a hard-headed, practical race like the Romans, or—I had almost written—the British Protestant. These maxims of profit and loss, or of "Self-help" (to quote the name of a once-famous book by Mr. Samuel Smiles), are always floating in the air of a Protestant country, and colour its religion, and Catholics are lucky if they never inhale the microbes unawares.

It is indeed a pity to have to be always on our guard against infection, and we may apply to our condition in a non-Catholic land what Thomas à Kempis says of our earthly pilgrimage in general: *It is heart-breaking to be living always in a state of war*. Nevertheless there may be compensations in a state of feud; it ought to make us keep our weapons bright and sharp, or, to put metaphor aside, it should force us to think more often than perhaps we would otherwise have done on the foundation and the value of devotion to Mary. Just because in a Catholic country a great reverence for her is a matter of course, it may not mean in every case that personal realization of our duty which is the one thing necessary. We can repeat what other

people are saying without making it our own. We do not incur this danger when all outward acts of honour to Mary are professions of faith, and may draw on us the ridicule of those who know her not.

So far, so good. But even now we have hardly got to the heart of the subject. Loyalty to our Faith, even loyalty to our ancestry, if it so be that we come of an old Catholic stock which perhaps suffered for its religion in the penal times, would prevent our slighting or allowing others to slight the Mother of the Lord, but we may stop very far short of any enthusiasm in her service. That is a point which deserves investigation in this month of May. I may be ready to die for Mary, for her cause, if only because I know it is the cause of her Son, but am I ready also to live for her? In other words, does she enter seriously into my religious life? How am I practically a better man for my prayers to her, and for the place which she occupies in my frequent or infrequent thoughts? She is, I know, perfectly sinless, and the embodiment of all the virtues, as fair a copy of her Son's human holiness as can be imagined. Yet even this of itself, though it attracts my admiration, does not compel my love, and until my heart opens to her she cannot count for very much as a stimulus in my life. We are led, no doubt, to imitate after a fashion what we admire, but after all the great transforming power is love. One spark of love will help me more to understand Mary, and to form myself upon her image, than a whole set of theological tomes.

Our minds, indeed, need to be enlightened by the truths of faith, but in an unbelieving age our hearts also need to be touched. As they soften, Mary's influence penetrates deeper and deeper as if a barrier was removed. Her humility, her purity, her gentleness at once unfold themselves and take possession of the soul; God seems to give her a mother's right to mould her children according to her own spiritual likeness if they are willing to receive it.

It is remarkable that the saints were not only devout to Christ's Mother but also grew in devotion to her as their holiness increased, their love for the Mother keeping even pace, as it were, with their love for her Son. The more they came to know of God, and the better they loved Him, the greater necessarily became their appreciation of the dignity of His Mother, and their love for her waxed the warmer. Can we who are not saints afford to neglect that powerful intercession on which they relied so much?

XIX

CHILDHOOD

It is not so long ago that a cult, as it may be called, of childhood, of children in their pretty and endearing ways, shewed itself in this country before the War. Illustrations in papers and books, stories, puzzles, toys, all bore witness to it. *Diavolo*, uncanny though be the name, forgotten now very possibly by many of our readers, was once a favourite in Hyde Park and gave amusement and exercise to people who were no longer young. It was the fashion to throw one's memory back to early days, to the time of the nursery and of rattles, of hoops, or even of prams. Some may remember a popular picture entitled "His Majesty," representing a policeman holding up the traffic in some great London thoroughfare to let a little boy, clasping his nurse's hand, all unconscious of his dignity, toddle safely past. Somehow the sight strangely moved one partly to laughter, partly also—should one be ashamed to confess it—almost to tears? It seemed to mark the homage of the busy and giddy world, in its wildest haste, to innocence and youth. The pre-occupations of to-day have, very likely, turned our thoughts into other channels; and yet perhaps it will do us good to let our fancy roam for awhile where buttercups and daisies once grew,

and grew to be plucked by tiny fingers or trodden on by tiny feet to the sound of childish laughter as in the good days of old. There certainly is a graciousness and a rest in what may aptly be called the morning of life even when we only recall it in thought, which acts like balm on the wearied spirit broken by maturer cares. The morning air upon those uplands seems to blow more briskly than when we begin to descend into the vale of years. The Church fixes our attention on the Infancy of Jesus and offers it to us as a subject for our contemplation and our love. But this is not all. That Blessed Child Himself, when grown to man's estate and already engaged in His work of preaching His Kingdom, on a memorable occasion called forward a little child and set him in front of His Apostles as their pattern. *Unless you become as little children you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.* What a revelation! at once of the Kingdom of Heaven and of the character of its citizens.

It is not then a venerable age or long experience which is the necessary passport into the heavenly country, but the temperament, the dispositions of little ones. Only the King Himself, the Owner and the Ruler of the Palace, could speak words so clear, so full of authority. The poets from the beginning have been in love with youth, they have felt its charm without knowing rightly why, but then it is the province of poetry not to reason but to be thrilled, to feel, and to utter its feelings without being called on to give an account of

them, if only the feeling is genuine and the expression of it sincere. Writers too of fairy tales and lovers of the imagination, generally have been caught by the romance of youth, and found in its pretty illusions some temporary escape from the hard facts of life. "Heaven lies about us in our infancy," Wordsworth could write: "shades of the prison-house begin to close upon the growing boy." Tom Hood's lines still touch us all:

> I remember, I remember the fir trees dark and high;
> I used to think their slender tops were close against the sky:
> It was a childish ignorance, but now 'tis little joy
> To know I'm further off from Heaven than when I was a boy.

"Exactly so," the average British taxpayer will answer. "It is, as I thought, a mere matter of fancy and sentiment, and may be left to dreamers to answer themselves with if they like. I prefer to be a man in thought as well as in age and to 'put away the things of a child': and I shall do so in excellent company, in fact imitating therein the example of the Apostle Paul." And yet the Lord's own sentence stands written, "of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." There must be something of a mystery here, something below the surface. All God's words are unfathomable, even when they seem to be clearest. We cannot reach the bottom of the Divine thought because it has none, but we may at any rate go as far down as our intelligence will dive. What can there be in childhood which is a preparation for the Kingdom of Heaven, if I am to

put it in the philosophical jargon of the day, how does its *mentality* resemble that of Paradise?

First of all I should place the child's instinct—it is of course except in the case of the Babe of Bethlehem an instinct, a necessity—of entire *dependence* on another. Of itself it can do nothing, it cannot think for itself or provide for itself; it clings to its mother through need as well as through love; grown a little older, it has more wants, but they must be supplied by others; everything brings home to it, although it does not reflect upon it, that it cannot do anything by itself, or for itself, that it is not owned by itself but by somebody else who makes himself responsible for it, and to whom it must look for help in all its necessities. It does not draw this out as a theory or a philosophy of course, but it learns it by facts over which it has no control. Independence on the other hand is the parrot cry of mankind, and nowhere, by the way, more loudly or more insistently than in these islands. An independence has come to mean enough money to dispense with the assistance of others, which happy condition is regarded by many persons as a worthy object, well nigh the *summum bonum* of existence.

Compare for a moment these two states of mind in their bearing upon our position as creatures. The self-satisfied man who has inherited broad acres or who has worked his way up to wealth and fame will not stoop easily even in the presence of his Maker. He is less accustomed to ask favours than

to grant them. But a child must be a beggar, because it has nothing of its own; it must lean upon others because it cannot stand or walk by itself. There cannot be much independence in Heaven of the worldly type, and self-made men who have looked to themselves only for their salvation must have recanted their principles before they procured admission. The two sons of Zebedee seem to have hatched a little plot to secure for themselves the two highest places in Christ's Kingdom, and actually got their mother to be their mouthpiece (I do not like to think that she made the request of herself, and besides we know that quarrels over precedence among the Disciples were not unknown). The Master's answer was the presentation of the young boy to His audience: and He left them to decide in their own minds what room there would be for such contentions among the childlike citizens of the court of Heaven. For it must surely follow that there is a family likeness between the Blessed and those on earth whose characteristics are praised as fitting them in due time to join that glorious company. Let us pursue the subject further and see whither it will lead us. Perhaps we may discover deeper reasons still why the sense of dependence on grown-up people, corresponding to the necessary practice of it in children, is so good a disposition for pilgrims on their journey to the City of God.

It behoves us, then, to remember that it is not we who do great things for God, but God who works

great things through us. He uses us, to be sure, and we have our share in the total result by freely allowing ourselves to be used. But we are only His instruments: it is He who supplies the power, and directs it as far as we choose to submit to His guidance. He is Almighty, but He accommodates Himself accurately to our weakness; He will not force our will although He attracts it. Hence it comes that while we depend altogether on Him, He also in a true sense chooses to depend altogether on us. We can at once if we so desire increase or lessen the current of His help, or we may behave like unruly children in their nurse's arms who resist and struggle till she is almost in despair. God wishes us to be children, but not naughty children, and we may most safely abandon ourselves to His Will. Our business in life is or ought to be to fit ourselves for His tasks, to be ready and skilful workmen in His service, to be on the watch for and to carry out to the full all His behests. Further, by the conditions of the bargain, so to speak, God must see through our eyes, speak into our ears, employ our judgment, that is, He must always act upon us according to our human nature and through our human faculties, just so far as we give Him leave to go. He desires, for example, to clear and widen my spiritual sight, to whisper to me of His goodness and His love, or He wants to give my judgment the balance it needs; but I can refuse to have the scales taken wholly or partially out of my eyes, or to have my ears unstopped, or to be

taught to think aright. God must make the best of the instrument I offer Him, and may not even remedy its defects without my sanction. Indeed, if I like to fancy that I am perfect and practically to deny the existence of my faults, God is powerless against my obstinacy and can only look on and hold His Hand. Suppose I fashion a theory of my own, map out a course I consider my affairs temporal and spiritual ought to follow—many if not most people do something of the kind—and suppose, which is very likely, that God's scheme does not agree with mine, runs across it, thwarts it, contradicts it in nearly every particular, without, as far as I can see, any rhyme or reason, apparently out of pure perversity—what is to be done? Probably I was wrong in the beginning in charting my life, at any rate, so positively at all; but however that may be, it is quite certain that our good God has no pleasure in gainsaying us, for gainsaying's sake, and that He cannot be perverse because *all His judgments are right.* Naturally I am engaged in this paper mainly on the affairs of the soul, but what I have just said applies to mere worldly matters as well. I believe we should have much more of the Divine blessing on our undertakings and more help in conducting them, if we carried into our adult life that habit of waiting on God and looking for everything from His Hands, which necessity taught us as children with regard to our earthly parents. Are we not enjoined in the Lord's Prayer to beg from Him every day our daily bread?

We add to our years and think that we add to our wisdom. We become better versed in the world's ways and gain a larger experience of its wiles. We learn to be more on our guard against fair professions and foul practice. Meanwhile we are apt to pride ourselves on our advance in shrewdness and justness of thought. We have earned our right, as we consider, to the title of men of the world—not bad men, of course, or irreligious men, but men who can form a sound estimate of what is going on around them and cannot be imposed upon and can hold their own, can keep their feet in the hurrying crowd of their fellow-men. Granted. We may be men of the world, but of which world, we are tempted to ask. We should feel it to be close upon the profane to add "of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." It seems to me that it is the greatest men, not petty men, who feel most of all the need of God: that it is the really learned men who make least of their learning, because they know how much more lies beyond; and that it is the really virtuous men who are humble because their standard of comparison is so high. We are all children to the end of our lives if we measure ourselves against God, and we are never wiser than when we own our dependence on Him and try to live in the thought of it. Let us grow grey, if we choose, in worldly prudence, but let us not mistake it for divine; let it not estrange us from childlike submission to Him who as a Child went down to Nazareth and was subject to Joseph and Mary as an exemplar for us.

XX

"THIS VALE OF TEARS"

Not seldom the best way of meeting trouble is to look it straight in the face: and it may be true philosophy to ponder a little life's present pressure instead of turning our eyes away. Nevertheless it is not my object to thicken the prevailing gloom, but rather by steadily regarding it to observe where it lightens and even opens into a brightness beyond. I venture even during this darkness, this eclipse of the sun of joy, this now longer than three years' nightmare over practically the whole earth, to maintain that not only will the dawn again arise, but that God wishes us to keep up brave hearts meanwhile. Religion is never so truly tested as in times of stress and strain; they are in fact its element, if I may so say. As long as the sun is shining and the birds are singing we can dispense with God: the world is able to take care of itself; but adversity and sundown and care bring other thoughts. We grow serious, almost sad, in spite of ourselves, and are filled with misgivings, we know not why. At no point, probably, do the paths of thought of the worldling and the religious man divide so sharply

as here, nowhere else is their outlook, their view of life so broadly different, and it will be of interest to attempt to trace its variations.

The citizen of the world then would be slow to accept a vale of tears as a proper description of his domain, or at any rate a final description of it. He would perhaps admit that in the past or doubtless in the immediate present human existence has had plenty of rubs and woes, but there is a good time coming, he would say. We are improving, science is expanding, comforts are multiplied, disease is combated, the death-rate is falling and man becomes more kindly to his fellow-man. Altogether it cannot be denied that to a sensible man the globe every year offers greater and greater attractions, and with anything like decent luck he may make himself very happy upon it, and the less he falls into the tearful strain about its drawbacks and inevitable chances the better for himself. We must take things as we find them, it is no good going to meet misfortunes; bow your head to the advancing billow, and raise it again unsmothered: we do not know how long the tide will be coming in, how long life will last, and what avails it to speculate without any basis of facts? Never acknowledge defeat, and you are sure somehow to worry through. Keep on smiling until life's curtain falls. These are the maxims in lieu of religion—I was going to say, this is the religion in which men are now trying to find comfort at home or "in the deadly breach" or trench. The wonder is that so

flimsy a texture can make so brave a show. Our war cripples, our blind and halt and maimed, in picture and to some extent in fact, appear blithesome and gay. It certainly is marvellous, it is one of the world's miracles, like those wrought by the Egyptian magicians of old, that our wounded soldiers seem so unconcerned at their lot. Are they always so happy as they seem? Will mere natural motives support them in the long years after the war? But these are questions which we need not now ask. My object is not to prove how helpless the world's philosophy must always be when we need it most, but only to set side by side what its professions are, its aims, its hopes, and on the other hand the ideals of Christianity. And it will come as something like a shock to many people to be told that at bottom there is very little difference between them if properly understood. The average unreligious or irreligious man if he thinks at all, is usually convinced that the logic of the case is entirely on his side, that he is right in following the majority, or what is called the best opinion of the day, and that the religious minority is mainly made up of daydreamers and women. Put aside the clerical profession as necessarily not impartial; and the Army and the Navy, the Senate and the Bar, Commerce and Society, Medicine and Science, in fact all sensible and practical persons are agreed that it is the business and indeed duty of life to get out of it as much enjoyment as possible. Now religion, narrow technical religion, teaches just the

opposite: in its view you are never so just, never so holy, you never feel so good as when you are making yourself (of course, for what you choose to call God's sake) as miserable as possible. Here is a clear issue: the world stands for joy and jollity, the righteous for sourness and gloom. Which of the two is right?

At first blush it certainly looks as if the world had the best of it. It denies or conceals, so far as it can, that life is a valley of tears; good people are never tired of proclaiming that a valley of tears it is: those who love mourning will therefore side with the good, and the rest, far the largest portion, will pass over to the camp of the pleasure-lovers. And yet, as I have already said, the two apparently conflicting views are really at one. They are the fruit of a mistake, of an age-long misunderstanding. The world is quite wrong in thinking that the Catholic Church desires her children to be on principle sad; and let me in fairness add that her children misconceive her, if they suppose her to reckon downheartedness as a virtue. Religious people are quite as ready as irreligious to take happiness of mind as a test of sound views of life, they set cheerfulness and joy and contentment quite as high; only they ask that these good things be lasting because built on a solid foundation, not mere will-o'-the wisps, luring men on to a heavier fall. So far is virtue from claiming kinship with low spirits, discouragement, pessimism and others of that brood, that she regards them as among her

worst because most insidious foes. Satan in our own days rarely does a better stroke of work than when he can persuade the simple to follow his advice because it will free them forsooth from the melancholy of religion.

Our God is a God of joy, and desires to be served with joy and willingness. The curse of Jansenism and of Puritanism and of all other rigorisms, whatever their names, is their chilliness and constraint. They freeze men's hearts and they fetter their limbs. They drive gladness out of life and make it a merit to be dismal. False ideas of this kind are so opposed to man's natural cravings and aspirations, that no religion which expresses them can either be widely popular or influential. This world is called a valley of tears not because we need be or ought to be always shedding tears in our passage through it, but in contrast to the Better Land, the Promised Land of Paradise whither we are hastening, where every tear will be wiped from our eyes and mourning shall be no more. Further, this world is undoubtedly full of trials and disappointments and it has its seasons of terrible anguish such as we are encountering now; but it is also true that all these troubles will have an end, they are only a season however prolonged, and the dreary night will be followed by the day, even on earth, even before the consummation of all things.

The fatal mistake made by the typical man of the world is that he recognizes no other world than this. He knows of no other, or at any rate takes

account of no other. Consequently to fail here, to miss rank, money, pleasure, his aim here, is to fail for always. He has no conception of, no relish for rewards which cannot be translated into the terms of this visible life; "the things of the spirit" are to him as shadowy and unreal as that spirit itself—the human soul—if he believes in it or pays any heed to it. As therefore the span of his own life here below entirely bounds his horizon and he sees nothing above or outside it, he is forced to judge of everything by its standards, and is at the mercy of its varying chances which he can neither control nor foretell. On the contrary the children of the Church, exposed to the stroke of fortune like other dwellers upon earth, feel it keenly indeed, but without resentment, for they know it has been dealt by a Loving Hand which will in due time heal the wound Itself has given. Death to the Christian is the gate not into Nothingness, but into Life, where the injustices of this life will be repaired and every man rewarded according to his works. There the careers full of promise cut short prematurely, as men speak, by the shell in battle or perhaps by the midnight wave in the case of a torpedoed ship, will expand into their full and proper proportions in the air of heaven. The hopes of fond parents have indeed been wrecked, the visions of their boy's greatness on this earthly scene have faded. He might have played his part so brilliantly, they thought, in arms; or, when peace was concluded, in letters; or in the senate or at the

bar. Or he might have prolonged and enhanced the glories of an already historic name. Doubtless these things might have been. We may descant upon the theme and enforce its sadness and pile up its aggravations almost without end. Yet after all, real, terribly real though such pangs of memory or imagination are, they must at best be concerned with that globe only of which it is written that "the earth and the works which are in it shall be burnt up." In that heap of ashes who would care to pick out if he could any of the trinkets or decorations, which once glittered on human breasts? Why need we then be inconsolable that our dear ones should be taken early or late from a habitation destined to the flames? Is it so great a thing to make a figure in the world of diplomacy or literature or art, that parents should be broken-hearted because their sons have died instead on behalf of their country and their God? To those who cannot or will not lift their eyes higher than the tomb, to whom the heavens are empty of God and the earth bears no sufficient witness of His Hand, life is truly a vale of tears however it goes with them; it is unsatisfying in its beginning, in its middle, and its end. But to men of goodwill its trials are bracing, its disappointments are never without hope, and its very sorrows are an earnest of that eternal peace for which they create the yearning and which they merit. Through the vale of tears we pass at length into the city "which hath no need of the sun nor

of the moon to shine in it. For the glory of God hath enlightened it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof."

And meanwhile, there is always for us Catholics, God Himself be praised, a Fountain springing up into and Itself imparting everlasting life. Here we may bathe our sin-stained souls, here cleanse and heal their gaping wounds, here slake our thirst and renew our strength. The Prince of Peace deigns every morning to become our Guest if only we invite Him, and with Him for our Companion and our Guide we need fear no terrors, we cannot be hopelessly or for long unhappy even in this Vale of Tears.

XXI

APOSTLESHIP

No one can reflect a little on the coming of God into the world in our human nature without being led on to wonder what cause brought Him down from His Throne. It was to fit us, each of us, in our own appointed time to mount up whence He had descended. He came to teach us the way of eternal life. And in the same measure in which we understand the importance of this His Mission shall we be eager for its fulfilment in our instance and in that of others. This is the idea which lies at the root of all Apostleship, that is, of all the help which we give to others to enable them to live better lives. We desire that God's goodness in becoming Man should be as widely rewarded as possible, and we are greatly encouraged in our labours by knowing that they have a real value for this object.

Such an Association as that of the Apostleship of Prayer, as its title denotes, trusts mainly to intercession for its weapon, but I propose to occupy myself in this paper with more general considerations, to dwell a little upon the dispositions of mind which ought to be found in all Christians who wish to be fellow-workers with God (I Cor. iii. 9). In the

forefront stands *zeal*, and we must look at it somewhat closely lest we mistake it for something else which is like it but is not itself. A well-known American phrase, a piece of advice given to young workers is to "get busy," to put one's hand to the work and get absorbed in it. To be zealous is to "get busy," for God. It is something to get busy in any matter, not to stand the whole day idle in the market of the world, waiting for some man to hire us, but taking no means to attract his attention and to display our skill or our strength. But what concerns us most, what indeed is our plain duty, is to engage ourselves in the business for which alone we were sent into the world. There are no "spare hands" on earth, men or women who have lighted upon our globe by accident or at random, who have lost their way, as it were, on their journey to some other planet, and, therefore, being out of their proper place, can afford the time to look curiously about them, and wonder what all the bustle means, although they have and can have no part in it themselves. We all of us have our own part and place assigned to us by God, and should all of us be helping to make the world go round by our own separate industrial push and pressure, not as mere spectators on a football ground. Never were the parts of the most complicated machine, from a watch to a torpedo, so nicely adjusted or so deftly made as is the mechanism, so to call it, of human life. Each one, to change the figure, has been cast for a particular

part, each of us bears our share in the unfolding of the drama, and on our playing our part well the success of the whole depends, if it is to realize the author's mind. In God's intention what an active scene this world should present. No one unoccupied, no one at a loss for work to do, no one unable to discover his own. *Traffic until I come,* our Lord said to His disciples: "Be always minting heavenly money." Never be idle, be always on the look out for fresh employment, new methods of business, new ways of making heavenly profit. What is a more favourite illustration in our Lord's discourses than that of the steward? We are all stewards, our souls and our bodies remain God's property even while they are ours, and we must look to it that we use them well, and be able to shew a good balance in our favour when we have to give an account of them at the hour of death. If we keep these truths before us, how strange it is to have to listen to the parrot-cries so characteristic of our age. *Life bores me! Life is not worth living! Why was I ever created?* Life bores only people who bore themselves, who make themselves their life, who do not look beyond or above themselves, and soon grow sick of themselves, as they well may. A witty Frenchman has said that there is one subject on which every man is eloquent—himself. That may be, but it is also a subject which is soon exhausted. Life must be disappointing, if I do not understand its meaning aright. It really is full of endless points of inter-

est and excitement. I am intended to be up and doing, to be influencing others and to be influenced by them, to be learning, to be teaching the arts of noble life. *Life not worth living!* Why, life is the constant striving of the creature after the Creator, and the Creator's daily, hourly uplifting of His creature nearer to Himself! *Why were we created?* That the play of circumstances and the clash of temperaments and the buffets of fortune, according to our individual needs, should bring out in every man what is best in him and quench what is basest. If we have not yet found out in our own case how this is to be managed, what our work in life is, and how we are to pursue it, how we are to help and how we are to be helped by our fellow-creatures, what are the weapons ready to our hands and how they are to be wielded, the fault certainly lies altogether in ourselves. Never before in the world's history were so many careers thrown open to ambition, never before were the sources of interest so multiplied for almost every possible taste, and yet by a strange irony never before did men seem to complain so bitterly of the emptiness of an existence which they rail at as already too long. *Why was I created?* Every man must answer the question for himself. If he puts it at all in his own case, it is a clear proof that he is not busy about the things of life which matter. How then are we to get busy? Where are we to make a start? What hinders us doing what it is so necessary to do?

The prospect of trouble, the fear of consequences. It is therefore to this topic that we must now address ourselves. When the famous Curé d'Ars, Blessed Jean-Baptiste Vianney, was once questioned as to his own opinion of the cause of his success, he is reported to have answered simply: I can only say that I have never been afraid of taking trouble. Doubtless taking trouble has a very different meaning in different mouths. It may signify heroic effort or putting on a penny-stamp the right way up. But it is the habit of mind, the way we have of looking at things which is of importance. In a sense, it matters more whether we are afraid of trouble than whether we can tackle the trouble successfully when it comes. For if we cannot bring ourselves to face possible exertion and worry even afar off, it is not likely that we shall go to meet it near at hand. How many will applaud a generous speech at a charitable meeting, and how few will write down their names! How an audience slinks to the door and melts away after an enthusiastic speech, when the Chairman announces that it is hoped that those able to render personal service will stay behind for a little time! And yet it would probably be a rash judgment to conclude that the outgoing stream was made up of none but hard-hearted, close-fisted persons. At the mere sound of subscriptions or personal help they pricked up their ears and pressed their fingers tightly on their pockets or bags, and sought immediate safety in flight. They were afraid of taking

trouble or of being wheedled into taking trouble against their will. Of course if they read their own hearts aright and their behaviour represented a settled, deliberate condition of mind, there is nothing more to be said. I am however going to be bold enough to call this into doubt, and to offer some reasons for believing that there is a good deal more generosity and courage in human nature than it gets credit for, if only we could tap its sources. In my view the majority of men, and perhaps still more of women, are capable of far higher deeds and endurance than they give proof of or even know themselves, and the cause of their failure is that self-distrust, that preliminary fear of trouble which the humble Curé d'Ars had overcome, without apparently realizing how much his words meant. How many great enterprises have been nipped in the bud, how many fervent resolutions have died in the heart or on the lips of aspiring souls for fear of this spectre of consequences, the trouble that may follow on action. We think ourselves unable to be of any use, and thereby unfit ourselves by the false persuasion itself. And so a terrific struggle such as that in which so many of the nations of the earth are now engaged has at least this good result, that it shews to numberless men who would otherwise have lived ignoble lives, of what self-sacrifice they are capable in a worthy cause. How many young men, almost boys, must have flinched in imagination, picturing to themselves, as it is now not difficult to do, their future

life in the trenches by day and by night, and yet they have gone forward and are still going forward into the fighting line, and bear themselves well. Since God has placed us in these days of war, ought not we who stay at home to learn a lesson for our service of Him from the conduct of those who are fighting on behalf of the Sovereigns of earth?

We are familiar with the method followed at present in the training of our young soldiers, how they are first taught drill and every kind of gymnastic exercises, and then gathered into camps, and practised in the use of arms and such evolutions as are needed in the peculiar warfare at the front. We too should put ourselves into training for our Apostleship, for making ourselves helpful to our fellow-men in life's spiritual war. What we must practise are the exercises not of the body, but of the soul. Let us begin with our imagination, so apt to become weak and unruly in this luxurious age. An imagination fed principally on pleasure and amusements takes fright at hardships and the sordid surroundings of the life of the poor, but our imagination is intended to be our servant, not our mistress, and we must keep it in check. It plays on many of us a trick against which we should be particularly on our guard. It says to us—perhaps not without some suggestion from the father of lies—"You are simply unequal to the good work you are proposing, see how the mere thought of it perturbs you: your natural shrinking from

it is in itself proof positive that it is too much for your strength; if you feel such a coward now, what will you feel on the occasion itself?" The one sufficient answer to all these vain fears, and alas! they are only too common in the present day, is the picture of the Saviour stretched on His Face in the Garden of Gethsemane; He has prayed His Father in vain that His chalice should pass away from Him: then He rises to face His Passion and Death. His terror was real, His repugnance bitter beyond anything which we can taste, but through that human weakness He marched on steadfastly, resolutely, to triumph—for love of us.

XXII

HOLINESS IN A NUTSHELL

It is a great convenience to have a short formula of holiness, a motto—if possible, a single word, which goes straight to the heart of the matter and keeps us there. The subject is so vast that without some guidance of this kind we are likely to lose heart and not to attempt it at all. It is not the dearth of treatises which is our bane, but rather the multiplicity of them. To plant oneself before the bookshelves of a well-appointed ascetical library and to let one's eyes rove over the mere titles of the volumes:—*Perfection according to St. A, or B, or C; The Spirit of St. Benedict*, or of *St. Dominic*, or of *St. Francis of Assisi*, or of *St. Ignatius*, or of *St. Francis of Sales*, is for a simple person, and it is for simple persons I write, almost like entering a chemist's shop, and falling to wonder which of the mysteriously-lettered preparations is best adapted for our own case. Of course, I am not denying the priceless value of ascetical works, we cannot have too many of them of the right sort, I mean especially those suited to our own day—I wish we had more of them of our own, of native growth, not mere importations

from abroad. But I own to a weakness, as I was saying, for simple persons, ordinary persons, partly because I belong to that denomination myself and partly because I consider that not enough provision is made for our particular wants in current spiritual books.

If I want to build my nest among the eagles, and spurn at once the common ways of men, I know where to obtain all directions (if I can understand them) in St. John of the Cross, or St. Teresa, for instance; but if I am walking along the surface of the earth, indeed, if the truth be told, unwillingly kissing Mother Earth in many a fall, where can I get a clue to follow, both easy to see and strong enough to hold on by in the slippery maze? I do not want a library of theology, or a method of meditation, or even an "order of the day"—I want a plan practical, precise, never-failing in any conceivable circumstances, of *how to be good*.

Now, to construct our plan. I begin by assuming that the whole world is laid out on a plan, in which I have a place, and therefore a work to do, because no one is intended to stand idle in the market place of life. Further, strange to say, this plan is at once flexible and fixed, or perhaps I should say, there are two plans—the original scheme drawn out by God, and the actual scheme, which is very much what human perversity or ignorance has made of the first one—all Adam's descendants except Mary Immaculate having copied more or less closely the bad example of their

ancestor. So it seems that I must not take it for granted that whatever is is best, for plenty of things happen which God never originally intended or wished to happen, and I must not fold my philosophic arms and look out on what passes before me as if it were no concern of mine and involved me in no responsibility. In other words, I am not quite sure without further investigation that where I chance to find myself—my state of life as it is called—and the occupation on which I am engaged are according to scale, and fulfil the Divine requirements. And yet, to be doing what God means me to do, in the capacity which God has marked out for me from all time, that is, from eternity, is plainly essential to a good life. Here then we are abreast of one of the main difficulties of our task. Who is to tell me, what is to tell me, that I am fitted into exactly that part of the world's mechanism for which God has designed me, in so far of course as I can have had or can have a voice in the matter by the use of my own free will?

Fortunately, or unfortunately, most men do not fidget themselves by thoughts of this kind, and are content to take life as they find it; they follow in the footsteps of their father, embrace his profession if he had one, if not, pick out one for themselves as their fancy or abilities suggest, and if the first venture fails try another in the hope of better luck. Let us, however, suppose this point settled to our satisfaction. We have no reasonable doubt that we are, in a wide sense at any rate, properly

placed in life, in that department of it for which we were made, and nothing is now left for us except to decide from day to day, perhaps from hour to hour, how we are to get forward in our business. But how far from easy is this decision in the complexity of modern life, even for persons (like ourselves) of well-balanced minds! It is not hard, speaking generally, to discover God's Will about large questions, whether I am to be single, or married, and so forth, but to see it in countless, unimportant, ever-recurring details, there's the rub.

I turn for light, for guidance to some classical —I do not mean pagan—tome, to some weighty book of accepted authority, which embraces the whole duty of man to God. It is indeed a perfect encyclopædia, a spiritual dictionary, but I scarcely know what subject to refer to, what heading to turn up. After much reading I conclude that the only thing of consequence is to obey God (would that I knew exactly how and where?) and also—this bit of wisdom more than repays me for my long research—that God wishes us to serve Him in simplicity and peace.

I am grateful for the help I have received and am resolved to profit by it; I have stolen away from the precincts of sacred erudition, which indeed I rarely enter, when, to be quite honest, already new doubts arise in my aching mind. In the course of my consultation—at the very height of it, in fact—I came across, how I cannot stop to explain, the title *curse* or *cursed: cursed be he who*

doth the work of the Lord negligently, a Scripture text which the writer expounded with terrific force. At the moment I had not fully grasped his meaning, I suppose, but now, when I was recovering my senses as it were, my new found peace and certainly all my simplicity was shattered at a blow. It was perplexing enough to make out what were the precise circumstances in which God is to be obeyed, but if I must also make sure that my diligence is always up to the mark and I am to be accursed both here and hereafter (as the learned expositor was careful to note) in case of any default, I am, it appears, in worse plight than ever, my knowledge has only bound a double burden on my back: I must ascertain the Divine Will, and always perfectly perform it on my soul's peril. Only conscientious souls—and such, pray let me observe, are to be found among merely ordinary people—can know by personal experience what a thumbscrew this idea of perfection in our everyday actions may become. Have I done my best? Has anyone ever done his best, and how did he know that he was doing his best? Foolish people try to stop my mouth by saying: Well, do your best; at any rate you can do your best! Which is just about the last thing in the world which I *can* do; common sense itself tells me *that*. I may do well, or I may do better, but to do my best must be the hardest thing of all.

Meanwhile, gentle reader, I have not produced *my* plan. I have been poking a little fun, though

in the spirit of most genuine sympathy, at other suggested ways out of a real tangle. What is wanted, remember, is some watchword or briefly expressed principle, easy to understand, easy to apply, which brings me at once into touch with the true object of life and helps me to work for it, which requires no deep knowledge of philosophy, or theology, or asceticism, and is, according to a phrase which my friends are fond of using to me when they offer me instruction, "level to the meanest capacity."

My talisman, my nutshell, a small thing even among nutshells, is, as I promised, a single word, a word of one syllable, a word of three letters. It does not oblige the utterer to face the problem of his vocation and, when he has settled that, to make up his mind if his present business falls within it or not; in other words, he need not ask himself if he is engaged on what God wishes him now to do, although of course he would follow God's Will if he knew it; nor again need he wonder whether he is doing God's Will in the best possible way, as indeed, being only a feeble mortal, he probably is not: he has to put one question only to himself and on his answer to that his holiness, all holiness depends. Why is he working, for whom, for what? If he can answer that question satisfactorily all is well; if he cannot nothing is well. The reason is very simple and yet, as might be expected, so deep that it seems almost an irreverence to devote to it the few lines only which remain to

me. The truth is, then, to put the matter as shortly as possible, that it is not what I do, or the way in which I do it which God regards, but *why* I do it. What I do, what the whole human race, what all creation does, or how it does it, is as nothing to God. Plainly, He could entirely dispense with His creatures' aid if He so wished, for their very power of aiding comes from and is supported by Him alone. He could do by Himself perfectly what we do so imperfectly under His Hand—and yet, No!

The work we do and the manner of doing it He could supply; what He yearns for is the free consecration of that work to Him. He never forces the human will; it is always in the power of the creature to choose what is right or wrong. Grace helps, enlightens, quickens our endeavour. God is working with us in everything we do; begins, accompanies, perfects every act. And yet all the while the act remains our own free offering to Him. Our heart always remains our own, and this is why He longs for it and stoops to be a beggar for it. St. Augustine beautifully says, "God crowns in us His own gifts." They are His own and yet ours too in a true sense. They express what we wish to do for Him.

When we stand, sooner or later, at His Judgment Seat the question put to us will not be "*What* have you done?" or, "*How* have you done it?" but "*Why* did you do it? Did you mean well, for all your blundering? Did you rise to your feet again

after all your falls? For what did you live? For whom did you live? Was it for Me?"

There is no darkness so thick, no storm so furious in human life that we cannot be sure of pleasing God during it, if only we wish; for the sincere wish to please Him is the pleasing itself.

XXIII

WORRY

There is a well-known jingle, "Never trouble trouble till trouble troubles you"—or words to that effect—and it may serve to introduce some thoughts on one of the characteristics of our day. We may not be wiser than our grandfathers or grandmothers, as the case may be, but we certainly give a good deal more attention than they seem to have done, to the inside of what we call our minds, and can talk learnedly about transactions within them, such as *nerve-storms, phenomena of subliminal consciousness, etc.*, which our happy forebears either knew not or ignored. The men of old threw their thoughts as far as possible outside themselves, and found the external world endlessly interesting; we, on the contrary—as though we had already unriddled all the secrets of Mother Earth—turn our eyes in upon ourselves and make ourselves our main study. It is plain that there are certain advantages in this plan, in this change of mental attitude; perhaps our ancestors lived too much the life of the senses and revelled in them unduly, and were led away by them, like children, into excess. On the other hand, the modern methods of introspection have dangers of their own, as I shall try to set forth. They create an artificial, hotbed kind

of atmosphere within the soul—stifling, enervating, sickly—in which idle fancies thrive. They are nurseries of *worry*, and worry is one of the Capital Vices of over-zealous folk!

What, then, is worry anyway? Of course, not genuine, well-grounded trouble. That is no laughing matter. "Man born of a woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries." It is precisely because so many real miseries abound that we should be stern against impostors. And worry is faked, brummagem trouble, and therefore to be exposed and to be turned out of doors, neck and crop, as soon as possible. Now to worry is to make oneself unhappy about small matters, or about big matters in a small way; that is in a petty, profitless way which cannot avail to remedy the evils complained of. Let us take the department of small matters first, and let us begin, as is easiest and, indeed, much more pleasant, with the foibles of our neighbours. Falstaff exclaimed, "Good Lord, how the world is given to lying!" and we may protest in like manner, not in anger but in sorrow, "How the world is given to worrying!" Over what trifles our friends lose their peace of mind! Missing 'buses, unpunctuality of meals, failures in cookery, disappointments in shopping, the vagaries of the weather. But these, after all, are passing things. What about habitual or, as they may be called, temperamental worries? What are we to say of people who seem never to do anything else except worry, who are always in a state

of worry, as naughty boys are always in hot water; for whom a friend's delay always means an accident; every night is a Zeppelin night (through private information, of course), and who are perfectly sure that all our "Tubes" have been undermined? We smile over these eccentricities in others, but are we quite free from them ourselves? Should we be willing to go before a medical board of sanitary (soul) inspectors, if such could be formed, as our young officers are examined and passed as sound before they start for the front? We ourselves are always in the firing line, needing always, in the words of St. Paul, to take "the shield of faith wherewith we may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one." We ought to have strong nerves and not be apt to worry over false alarms. How many of us would come off triumphantly from an examination of the soul? Perhaps we do not dream of Zeppelins, or have places reserved in our own or some friend's contiguous cellars, but there are other bogeys which may haunt our midnight couch. The thoughts, the fears of the day, easily reappear at night. Happy the man who never lies awake, or is never aroused from slumber by worries, worries, worries! How they rack the brain, and wear out the nerves, and sap the forces of their victims! The gentle St. Francis of Sales used to say that next after sin the greatest evil in life was having too much to do. In this twentieth century is it not, peradventure, having too much to worry over? And yet it is not

quite fair to the world's history after all, to make out that worry is entirely a birth of our own time, although it marks it, as we have said, in a special way, and naturally, almost necessarily, grows and spreads along with the complications of modern life.

What lessons did our Saviour teach more forcibly and more beautifully during His stay upon earth than the avoidance of worry? "Be not solicitous therefore, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewith shall we be clothed?" To this, however, it may be answered that often it is not material wants, food, drink or clothing, which constitute the troubles of the day, but rather the soul's diseases or indispositions, and it is these we ought to discuss. These, doubtless, are big matters, and we have already said that it is possible to be guilty of worry by dealing even with great matters in an aimless, unprofitable way. Thus we have arrived at the second division of our subject and the more difficult, and at the same time we become conscious of a considerable change of level; we rise upon a higher plane and into a keener air. We have to do henceforth with the worries not of the weak but of the strong. When we climb the lower hills we easily fancy that each successive peak is the true summit, and that we are nearing the end of our labours although it is still a long way off. So we please ourselves by thinking that our next advance in virtue will set us safe beyond the reach of worry, and that we shall have got too

high for even the swarm of midges and gnats to follow us. But all the stages of the ascent mean hard breathing and have their own peculiar pests. The troubles of the fervent may be said to spring from their very fervour itself. They want to be faultless and they cannot be. They are resolved that Rome shall be built in a day and Rome refuses. What they take for Rome is so lop-sided, or so frail, that it topples over at the first gust of wind and they catch a bad cold in the ruins. Nowhere is jerry-building more common or more disastrous than in the work of beginners in virtue. And yet it is by the test of time only that it can be tried. Experience has to be bought in the world of spirit as well as in material things. It is only by degrees that we come to know where and how great is either our weakness or our strength.

Meanwhile, it is more than likely that we are mistaking one for the other. The irritable accuse themselves of meekness, and the humble blame themselves for pride. Thus they take a great deal of pains to keep away from what they need, and run straight into the arms of their worst foe. They worry where they should be calm, and are unconcerned when they should worry. I am not sure, however, that the most troublesome form of worry among good people is not a certain fidgettiness or restlessness which gives them no peace even when they are doing their best, and persuades them that they are going backward when they are moving rapidly ahead. At last it may reach such a pitch

that they read spiritual signs the wrong way round, and lose heart and are depressed when they have every reason for encouragement. Some instances may help to make this point clearer. Not a few persons are fond of accusing themselves in confession of feeling pleasure when they happen to be praised. Why should they not? Ought they to have felt displeasure instead? Where is the fault? Our friends and even superiors ought to be very chary of distributing praise, if this theory be true, lest they become the occasion of another's sin! To deny God's share in our performances is, of course, wrong; but who thinks of doing so, if we are philosophic enough to give the matter a distinct thought at all? Others are distressed because they are *not* distressed to hear of the misfortunes of their enemies, or because they are sorry that some one else has obtained the position they coveted for themselves or for one of their family. Jealousy, that is, jealous thoughts which come unbidden and stay without permission, is a thorn in the side of others which no good resolutions are able to pluck out. Then many, almost the majority of good people, torment themselves about temptations to conceit or grosser things against which there seems to be no remedy. Morning, noon and night their minds are filled with ideas of their own present and future importance, which they themselves see to be ridiculous and would gladly banish if they could, but struggling makes matters rather worse than better. They recall their past sins, they remind

themselves that they are only dust and ashes, that all their charms must quickly fade—the demon whispers, "they have not faded yet!"—they try invocations and ejaculations and pious reading, and still no rest! Who can rightly estimate the waste of time, the torture of conscience, the fits of the "blues" which stand to the account of an exaggerated fear of human respect? I speak not of the thing but of the apprehension of it; of the way in which excellent souls convince themselves that their motives are all wrong or impure because they cannot forget the existence of their fellow-creatures!

There is one short but satisfactory solution, as I believe, of all these difficulties—my limits, and perhaps the patience of my readers, forbid me to expand it. They all go upon a false supposition. Saints may not love to be praised, but do you claim to be a saint—as yet? Saints, perhaps, are grieved at the evil plight of their enemies, if they have any. Even saints are not strangers to the visitation of vain or proud or sensual thoughts, only they do not mind them; they do not pay them the compliment of wilfully attending to them. When you are completely humble you will be delivered not from vain imaginings but from worry about them, and so of the rest. Meanwhile—I hope it will not be a very long while—I was going to write "grin and bear it," but I painfully feel that the phrase is below the dignity of high asceticism, so I will conclude: *Have patience; all will come right in God's good time. Above all, do not worry.*

XXIV

THE PRACTICAL DIFFICULTIES OF PRAYER

I hope the title of this article will make clear its humble scope and its limitations. I am not going to attempt in it an account of the different kinds of prayer and their suitability or unsuitability for particular persons or classes of persons. I do not want to take sides and to hold a brief for any of the recognized and rightly esteemed systems of prayer. Still less am I seeking to introduce to the public a private little nostrum of my own. I wish simply to talk over with my readers the difficulties which we all feel, I fancy, in our prayers, to whatever school we belong, or if as a matter of fact we are rather proud of belonging to no school at all, like that denomination of Christians which describes itself in Whitaker's Almanac as "Go-as-you-please." Anyone who can honestly put his hand on his bosom where his heart ought to be, and say that prayer suggests to him no trouble, need read no further; with him I have no concern. I am addressing myself to very human persons, and our bond of sympathy is our—I must not say dislike of prayer, but our misgivings regarding our prayers. It is no use beating about the bush, and

I will own at once, uncomplimentary though it sound, that I believe ignorance to be at the bottom of our griefs, ignorance of ourselves, and ignorance of God.

Lest this seem too alarming, I had better hasten to explain that I do not mean by ignorance of ourselves what is ordinarily called lack of self-knowledge, in other words, blindness as to our own defects. By ignorance I here understand a want of acquaintance with our nature, with the working of our own minds and feelings. Considering that our minds are in constant use and under our own eyes, so to speak, all day, it is not a little wonderful how small our knowledge really is of them and their ways. We advise a friend who has confided to us a fear or a suspicion, "Put it out of your head, never think about it"; or if it be the tidings of a great misfortune, "It's no use crying over spilt milk, don't you worry, put a bold face on things." The advice is excellent and well-meant, but in many cases impossible to follow. It may be answered that the adviser does not usually expect his counsel to bear fruit, that he gives it not through ignorance of the mind, but because he has nothing else to say and he must say something. I need not discuss the point. At any rate he assumes that his friend can act as he suggests to him whether it is likely or not he will do so, and that is all I need for my argument. My complaint is that we do not use the same weights and measures in divine as in human affairs, that whereas we cannot control our

minds at will with regard to things temporal, we should expect to do so with regard to things eternal. Indeed we are in a worse not better case in face of the unseen world, because the world of sense appears to be much nearer to us and more on our own level, as it were: it is easier to fix our attention on Piccadilly and its associations than on the gold-paved streets of the Heavenly Jerusalem; the alleluias of the angels heard by the inward ear are no match for the roar of traffic and the whistling for taxi's outside. Spiritual books and our own aspirations may tell us that we are born for higher things and ought to withdraw our thoughts from trifles and shams to raise them above the skies. We yearn to do so, but our efforts are in vain. Our bodies are bowed in the attitude of prayer in God's holy Temple, but our spirits have no strength to fly up aloft, or they quickly flag and are beaten back from Heaven's gates by the faintest whisper of the gales of earth.

All which proves clearly enough, many books of devotion would say, what worldlings we are and how displeasing to God our prayers must be, if they deserve the name of prayers at all. What it appears to me to prove is not our want of virtue, but our want of elementary knowledge regarding our own constitution of mind. God does not require of us or expect of us to be able in a moment to lay aside the weight of the body. We are men not angels. The soul in commotion is like the sea in a storm; it cannot settle down all at once; it

heaves, it swells long after the winds have ceased to blow. Again, even when its surface rocks and tosses, if we could go many fathoms down, we should find the tranquil depths and the creatures which inhabit them all undisturbed, as it were, entirely unconscious of the hurly-burly above. In that stillness God always dwells, and we can always find Him there. We worship Him, we love Him, we are united to Him not by the attention of the mind, which may wander, but by the purpose of the will which we can command. What keeps us on our knees, and withholds us from joining the busy throng in the street outside the church's door? Our will. Our will is ourselves, we hold ourselves in the hollow of our will. By our will we constrain our body not to budge from its position before the tabernacle, and by our will let our thoughts roam where they list. We present our soul one, undivided, to God for His acceptance. Every instant during which we prolong our visit is a further act of obedience to God, of submission to His Will. To be in church by our own choice is in itself a prayer, and, properly understood, is liable to no distraction, unless the material and literal one of tearing oneself away. Perhaps we say nothing. Why should we, why need we? The meaning of our attendance is plain enough without a word spoken. Our will has set us down within the precincts of one of God's palaces on earth—it may be a cathedral, it may be a country chapel—where He deigns to dwell bodily. We have come to see

Him, we have come to shew ourselves to Him. It seems almost irreverent to put our purpose into words, and yet it is no other and it cannot be otherwise described. "Dust and ashes," as Abraham called himself, begs an audience of his Maker. He has summoned us and we do not venture to disobey.

I have tried to meet the difficulties in the practice of prayer which have their origin, as I believe, in common mistakes about what prayer requires. It does *not* exact freedom from trouble of mind or from business thoughts or from what is familiarly styled "wool-gathering"; it implies no particular skill in reasoning or concentration or use of the imagination, in fact it is much less a matter of the mind than of the heart; it does not presuppose learning or special training or even devout life—or what chance will there be for poor sinners?—it is in reality the simplest of exercises, the most easily practised of crafts because it is implanted in our nature by God Himself, and it is nothing else than the cry of the child for its mother, the cry of mankind for our Father who is in Heaven. And so I pass on to speak of our ignorance of God, as our second hindrance in prayer. It is, I consider, far the more serious of the two.

If the turn of the phrase be not too familiar I would lay it down that God's good opinion of us chiefly depends on our good opinion of Him. I do not mean that God is open to flattery or that it can matter to Him in itself what we choose to think of our Creator, but that our behaviour towards Him

is founded on our thoughts of Him, and noble thoughts beget noble deeds. Intimate thoughts lead to intimacy, confiding thoughts to trustfulness and hope. Such expressions as "coming to God," "drawing near" to God are common in Scripture. What can their purport be, seeing that God is always with us, always within us? There can be no question of bodily movement. It means that the barriers between ourselves and God are being taken down. He stands at the door and knocks. If any man hears His voice and opens to Him the door, He will come into him. We open the door by offering Him a welcome: He cannot, He will not cross the threshold unless at our invitation. He will not force Himself upon us in opposition to our will. We meanwhile are in doubt and hesitate because we are afraid of our Visitor. He has many old scores against us—are they wiped out? We hold the door fast and think ourselves safer if He remains outside. These old scores, our past sins, how they seem to freeze and harden the heart! And yet it is not they, for they have been forgiven if we are sorry for them as we are, it is our foolish thoughts about them which do us harm and make us keep our fingers so tight on the latch of the door. It is our ignorance of God, our bad opinion of Him, our suspicion, which we cannot shake off, that He does not mean us well and is only looking out for some opportunity of taking advantage of us. We fancy that the difficulty of a perfect reconciliation between God and ourselves when we have

offended Him is on His part, whereas it is on ours. We cannot believe that if our sins be as scarlet they shall be made as white as snow. God *must* be angry, He *must* bear us a grudge, we keep saying to ourselves under our breath, we have behaved to Him so atrociously and not for the first, not for the hundredth time, therefore we can pay no heed to His knocking or His voice. He assures us of the contrary; as far as the East is from the West so far, He says, He has removed our iniquities from us; but we remain unconvinced, our heart misgives us even when His words are clear.

I repeat, it is this practical disbelief in the wonderful, exceeding mercy and forgiveness of God which disheartens so many sinners, and cuts short the career of so many who otherwise might have been saints. They are harder on themselves than is their Heavenly Master; they expect of themselves an immunity from human weakness and error which He does not as yet require; all would come right with patience and with time, but they lose hope when their ground for hope is strongest, and give up the race when they are almost within sight of the goal. We live in a day when there is little need to dwell upon the terrors of the Divine judgments (although they cannot be denied) or the dangers of presumption or the fewness of the Elect. Men will not be driven or frightened into the service of God; the human intellect was never, I will not say deeper, but more eager, more restless, more inquisitive; it will not be subdued by mere human

authority or logic; it is to God alone to whom it will bow and to God as revealed by Himself in word and in deed: to that God who has enjoined forgiveness of our brethren not seven times but seventy times seven, who came to call not the just but sinners to penance, who could find an excuse for the very men who were slowly doing Him to death. I venture to think that the prayers even of devout people within the Church would gain by a larger understanding of God's goodness as I have endeavoured to set it forth, by a greater simplicity, by a fuller hope. I own to occasional feelings of impatience with old-fashioned books which lecture me on irreverence and tepidity and the uncertainty of salvation, not because such things do not, unfortunately, exist, but because I am not helped by hearing so much of the diseases without the prescription of appropriate remedies. What I need is a tonic, something to brace my nerves and whet my appetite—something which will make me think better of God and of His love for me, something even to make me think better of myself, and believe that with God's help even I may turn out not to be the wretched failure which no doubt my friends predict!

XXV

THE SPIRITUAL SLACKER

If I may put myself in the ranks of that great public which spiritual writers are fond of addressing (a little contemptuously perhaps) as spiritual slackers, to use a modern phrase, I own to having a grievance, to having long had a grievance against my instructors which I am going to air in these pages. To put it quite simply and to imitate their own defect of courtesy, I consider that they sometimes do not know what or whom they are writing about and miss their aim accordingly. These gentlemen who live at high altitudes have the strangest notions of the mental conditions of those existing, as they suppose, on so much lower a level than themselves. We must appear to them impenetrably dull, or incurably wicked. To them we are always either fools or knaves, or, in that tremendous phrase, "given over to a reprobate sense." And yet we really are not so very unreasonable or so very difficult to understand if only they would take a little trouble in trying to do so. We have certain definite needs and we make certain plain demands, and these we desire to have satisfied. Poor creatures though our spiritual betters may

think us, we know what we want and we are in earnest about it. Let me endeavour to block out as in a plan what our requirements are.

First of all then we desire to be told what we are expected to *do* in order to prove ourselves practical Christians—not, please observe, what we are expected not to do, what in other words we must avoid. A good half of us spiritual slackers would be different men if only it was pointed out to us clearly what we ought to be at. Most of us, I suppose, get our theology mainly from the examination of conscience which we find in our prayer-books, and fix our attention mainly on what is made much of there. And in how many instances are these treacherous guides! Not so much by what they say as by what they imply. Of course they cannot explain themselves and there is rarely anyone at hand to explain them when needed. What a labyrinth and maze they present to the unwary! What winding passages! What unexpected turns! Crimes of the deepest dye jostling small infidelities in the motley list. The last effort of impiety treading on what have been the shortcomings of saints. There you have them all in a heap, tumbled out before you, all the ways in which you may break God's Commandments and the laws of the Church, then the capital sins, and the sins against the Holy Ghost and the sins crying to heaven for vengeance, and—in case you have escaped under all other counts—the nine ways in which we may become responsible for another's sin. I suppose it is right

that there should be such catalogues, such inventories of sins, and that there should be in them no perspective, no gradation, so that distractions (possibly quite unintentional), or the omission of grace before and after meals, should look quite as black on the printed page as missing Mass, or murder. I am for the moment concerned only with the impression produced, and I cannot help regretting that the Faithful on their monthly or fortnightly or even weekly inquiry into their state of soul should be invited to wander among the pitfalls aforesaid. It gives me, a mere worldling, the "creeps" unfailingly, and what is more, I rise from it or from them with a sort of feeling of hopelessness that I am sure is bad for my spiritual health. I go away thinking that religion is a collection of Don'ts, of Prohibitions, and Solemn Warnings. No Thoroughfare is posted up over so many of the roads that my first impulse is not to attempt to go forward at all, to dangle my legs over one of the fences and simply watch the falls of wayfarers bolder than myself. What I am in search of, I have said so already, but perhaps my voice is not strong enough to reach so high, where you authorities on the spiritual world seem to be sitting on the clouds, what we need down here on the solid ground on which we stand, is direction whither to go, what is the right road, not what is the wrong road, or the multitude of wrong roads. We have heard enough of "avoid evil," tell us something more of how to "do good."

Instead of preparation for Confession meaning, as it does to so many, long scrutiny into their monthly tale with many worries and unwholesome distractions and then a memory lesson of what has been raked together, carried carefully into the confessional as it were in both hands lest any grains should escape, why should not a few minutes suffice to recall our habitual faults and the rest of the time be given to remind ourselves of that Infinite Love and Goodness against which we have sinned? A few striking thoughts on these topics—God's bounty to us and our ingratitude to Him—might well take the place of our elaborate Tables of Sin and be a much greater help to a contrite and fruitful Confession. We worldlings are not at all so worldly as we seem. Take us the proper way and a great deal can be made of us. Show us that we have behaved badly to God, and we are quite ready to be sorry for it and to make amends. But make it quite plain to us and bring it home to us first, and do not ask us to take it for granted and keep us rooting among our sins, a dismal business at the best, when our eyes ought rather to be fixed on Him whom those sins have wounded. You will say that these motives are too high for such folk as we are, that they will be thrown away upon us, that we cannot grasp them or be touched by them. That is where you make the mistake. You do not understand human nature and therefore you do not know how to deal with it. You must take us by our best side, not by our worst. If you will per-

sist in regarding us as entirely selfish and ungenerous and mean, we shall live down to your estimate of our conduct; but put high things before us and believe us capable of noble deeds, and the more you raise your standard, you will find that the higher we shall climb.

You tell us that we are pleasure-loving: perhaps we are. Then why do you not prove to us that there is pleasure in a virtuous life, as illustrated in your own persons and faces, in your bearing cheerfully life's troubles, common at once to the just and the unjust? You must bait your hook according to the fish you desire to catch and according to the season. Assuredly we like pleasure; we have a sweet palate: God has given it to us not without meaning. My quarrel precisely is that my "pastors and masters," my preceptors in Christian doctrine and piety, seem to have forgotten all about that central fact. That is why I shout up to them in their eyries, in their nests far above, that they do not understand what we are like, so many leagues below. Why will they always, with a sort of perverse delight, dwell upon the difficulties and pains of the service of God instead of on its consolations?

Sometimes of course we have all to face troubles squarely, and to take their dimensions accurately, because only so we can overcome them. But thoughtful surgeons avoid a display of their weapons before the eyes of the conscious patient. How clever dentists are in persuading you that they

will positively give you no discomfort whatever on any account! Why then will the physicians of the soul be always reminding us, as if we were likely to forget it, that life is full of crosses, that we must constantly go against our natural inclinations, and give ourselves no rest if we are to make our calling sure? I do not say that these counsels are wrong, some of them are the words of Scripture itself, but it is the way in which they are (I was going to say) pelted at our heads in season and out of season, with no proper introductions or qualifications, which has made me lose my temper on the present occasion. It seems to me that my instructors are beginning at the wrong end. They talk of nothing but pains and penalties when they should be holding up to me joys and rewards. I turn to the Acts of the Apostles, of which I am not a daily reader, but of which some passages whether quoted or read have struck me forcibly before now, and I find it set down of the faithful in those early days that "they took their meat with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people." The popular favour was not indeed to last very long and they knew it; but this did not prevent them from rejoicing in God meanwhile. Their dangers and trials were certainly not less, but rather much greater than our own, and yet what lightheartedness, what trust in God blows, like a healthful wind, through the brief record of the life of the infant Church! Where lies the difference between their spirit and ours? They must

have found happiness in their work or they would not have clung to it. They could not have resisted the world's offers and threats unless they felt they had something higher and stronger in their own possession.

Where resided that fascination, what was that charm? It was no collection of cautions and inhibitions, restraining human freedom even though for its good. From such sources could never have sprung that noble enthusiasm which made the Apostles proud of their stripes endured for the sake of their Lord. He was their inspiration: His example, His words, His deeds. If they loved Him, if they followed Him, all the rest came about of its own accord. Hard lodging or no lodging at all is not attractive of itself, but is easy and even enviable if shared with Him. In war-time no soldier likes the trenches, no sailor the keen winds and the hidden dangers of the sea for their own sake; but they would not be elsewhere. They are glad to be where they are, to fight their country's battles. I hear pious people talk a good deal against the luxury of the present day, the multiplication of amusements outside wartime or even within it, and generally the more alluring garb in which this old world of ours manages somehow to deck herself the longer she lives. I am not going to dispute this view or to try to explain it. All I wish to remark upon it is, if it be true, why do not the pious people take a leaf out of their enemy's book and go into competition with him?

I and my kind do value a little colour, a little music, in life. Why are the "just" so often told in the Psalms—I know the Psalms as far as that at any rate—to keep up their spirits? You will impress us worldings much more if you will let us see not that a good life has its rubs, but that it is in reality vastly more pleasant than the other, that it is more satisfying, that it grows easier day by day. Can you not simplify matters a bit for us of the common sort—not be always talking of Meditation when you only mean *thinking of God*, or Recollection when you want to say *paying attention to God*? Ought good people to form a class apart, just pitying and tolerating their wicked neighbours, or ought they to leaven the whole mass and by their example shew that religion is not a thing apart by itself, but only human life lived with a view to God and for the help of our brethren? I am awaiting a response from the heights above me. Will their inhabitants come down one day in an aeroplane and test for themselves the truth of what I say! I can promise them that they will be well received, and will be astonished to find how many honest, good-hearted fellows there are still left upon earth, call them by whatever opprobrious epithets you will!

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